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The Middle Kingdom Renaissance (c.2055–1650 BC)

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Unlike the First and Second Intermediate periods, the Middle Kingdom (2055–1650 BC) formed a political unity, the core of which comprised two political phases: the 11th Dynasty ruling from the Upper Egyptian city of Thebes, and the 12th Dynasty centred in the region of Lisht in the Faiyum. Earlier historians considered that the 11th and 12th Dynasties marked the full extent of the Middle Kingdom, but more recent scholarship shows clearly that at least the first half of the so-called 13th Dynasty (which apparently bears no resemblance to a proper political dynasty) belongs unequivocally to the Middle Kingdom. There was no shift of the location of the capital or royal residence, little diminution in the activities of the government, and no decline in the arts of the time—indeed, some of the finest works of Middle Kingdom art and literature date from the 13th Dynasty. There was, however, a decline in large-scale monumental building, a significant indication that the 13th Dynasty was neither as strong nor as inspired by the grandiose ideas that marked the reigns of the later 12th-Dynasty rulers. Doubtless, this phenomenon was due to the brevity of reigns for the majority of 13th-Dynasty kings, although the reasons for such changes in the political picture are as yet unknown.

The simplest way to gain some sense of the general flavour of Middle Kingdom history is to study the succession of kings and their achievements, since they set the tone for the political and cultural directions of the period. However, in pursuing this course, we are forced to confront one of the biggest problems in our understanding of

Middle Kingdom history: the issue of the 'co-regencies' of the 12th-Dynasty kings. Simply put, the question is: did some of these rulers share the throne with their successors? Crucial elements in the debate are so-called double-dated stelae, texts incorporating the names of two successive kings, together with different dates for each of these rulers. These stelae have left scholars divided on the issue of whether the records represent a sharing of power by two pharaohs or merely the years during which the owners of the stelae held office under each of the two kings.

The standard chronology for the 12th Dynasty has been remodelled over the years in the light of intensive studies of dated monumental records. Some of this new work has yielded much shorter reigns than those suggested by the fragmentary Turin Canon and the epitomes of Manetho. The most controversial reigns are those of Senusret II and III, and there are wide discrepancies between the proposed chronologies of different scholars. Discoveries of certain 'hieratic control marks' carved on the masonry of the monuments of Senusret III have added further confusion to these chronologies, so that the dating problems of the 12th Dynasty are still in a state of flux. Josef Wegner, for instance, has provided very strong evidence for a reign of thirty-nine years for Senusret III that—together with the discovery at Lisht of references to a 'year 30' of Senusret III and evidence for his celebration of a *sed*-festival (royal jubilee)—would argue for a much longer reign by this king than most modern chronologies suggest. There are also grounds for suspecting that the reign of Senusret II is more likely to have lasted for nineteen years (as suggested by the papyri discovered at the town of Lahun) rather than the shorter length of the revised chronologies, but there is some difficulty in accommodating these expanded reigns within the absolute dates proposed by some scholars. The evidence for longer 12th-Dynasty reigns would fit in well with the co-regency theory, which is based on the double-dated monuments, but convincing arguments have also been put forward by a number of scholars seeking to refute individual co-regencies such as those of Amenemhat I–Senusret I, Senusret I–Amenemhat II, and Senusret III–Amenemhat III.

Since there are no true 'absolute dates' yet established in Egyptian history (apart from the radiocarbon-based chronologies) until the late New Kingdom at the earliest, and since argument still persists regarding the high, middle, and low dating schemes, there is room for revision in the chronologies for all pharaonic periods. It is possible that new archaeological material emerging from Tell el-Dab'a (see Chapter

8) will help to solve some of the problems in Middle Kingdom chronology, but in the meantime the account given in this chapter leaves co-regencies out of the equation, pending further proof.

The 11th Dynasty

The first 11th-Dynasty ruler to gain control of the whole of Egypt was Nebhepetra Mentuhotep II (2055–2004 BC), who probably succeeded Nakhtnebtepnefer Intef III (2063–2055 BC) on the Theban throne. Mentuhotep's tremendous achievement in reuniting Egypt was recognized by the ancient Egyptians themselves, and as late as the 20th Dynasty there were numerous private tombs containing inscriptions celebrating his role as founder of the Middle Kingdom. The increase in historical records and buildings, the evident prosperity of the land during the latter years of his reign, and the resurgence and development of all forms of art are particular indicators of his success in restoring peace. It is sobering to reflect that, after such a promising start, the 11th Dynasty was to collapse only nineteen years after his death.

Nebhepetra Mentuhotep II

Among the many rock carvings of various dates on the cliffs at Wadi Shatt el-Rigal, 8 km. north of Gebel el-Silsila, there is a relief incorporating a colossal figure of the 11th-Dynasty ruler Nebhepetra Mentuhotep II dwarfing three other figures: his mother, his likely predecessor Intef III, and Khety, the chancellor who served both kings. This has long been taken as proof that Mentuhotep II was the son of Intef III. Further such proof seems to be provided by a relief on a masonry block from the site of Tod that portrays Mentuhotep II towering over a line of three kings named Intef, lined up behind him, thus again suggesting family connections with the Intefs as well as a lengthy royal ancestry. This insistence on 'lineage', however, seems to beg the question of Mentuhotep's actual origins, and it would not be surprising to discover either that Mentuhotep had not been a royal son or that these monuments were a deliberate attempt to counterbalance claims made by the Herakleopolitan rulers as members of the 'House of Khety' (see Chapter 6).

Mentuhotep II appears to have reigned quietly over his Theban kingdom for fourteen years before the last phase in the civil war between Herakleopolis and Thebes erupted. We know virtually nothing of this conflict, but a graphic image of its savagery may well have

survived in the form of the so-called tomb of the warriors at Deir el-Bahri, not far from Mentuhotep II's mortuary complex. The unummified linen-wrapped bodies of sixty soldiers, clearly killed in battle and subsequently placed together in a rock-cut common tomb, were preserved by dehydration. Despite the absence of any embalming, these corpses are the best preserved of all Middle Kingdom bodies. Because they were buried as a group and within sight of the royal cemetery, it has been surmised that they died in some particularly heroic conflict, perhaps connected with the war against Herakleopolis.

The Herakleopolitan ruler Merykara died before Mentuhotep reached Herakleopolis, and with his death Herakleopolitan resistance must have collapsed, for Merykara's successor governed the northern kingdom for only a few months. Mentuhotep's victory over the last Herakleopolitan ruler provided him with the opportunity to reunite Egypt, but we have only indirect knowledge about how long this took and how severe such struggles were. This process may well have taken many years, for there are scattered references to other fighting throughout this stage of Mentuhotep's reign. One of the clues to the insecurity felt at this time is the inclusion of weapons among the grave goods of ordinary men; another is the depiction of administrators carrying weapons instead of official regalia on funerary stelae. However, as peace and material prosperity advanced within the country, such items seem to have diminished in frequency.

Part of Mentuhotep's reconquest included forays into Nubia, which had returned to native rule during the last stages of the Old Kingdom. There was at least one line of native rulers controlling parts of Nubia at the time when Mentuhotep II's armies descended upon them. An inscription on a masonry block from Deir el-Ballas, thought to belong to his reign, mentions campaigns in Wawat (Lower Nubia), and we also know that a garrison was established by Mentuhotep in the fortress at Elephantine, from which troops could more rapidly be deployed southwards.

In addition to the emphasis on his lineage, part of Mentuhotep's strategy to enhance his reputation with his contemporaries and successors was a programme of self-deification. He is described as 'the son of Hathor' on two fragments from Gebelein, while at Dendera and Aswan he usurped the headgear of Amun and Min, and elsewhere wears the red crown surmounted by two feathers. At Konosso, near Philae, he took on the guise of ithyphallic Min. Both this iconography and his second Horus name, Netjeryhedjet ('the divine one of the white crown'), emphasize his self-deification. Evidence from his Deir

el-Bahri temple indicates that he intended to be worshipped as a god in his House of Millions of Years, thus pre-dating by hundreds of years ideas that became a central religious preoccupation of the New Kingdom. It is evident that he was reasserting the cult of the ruler.

Mentuhotep's self-promotion was accompanied by a change of name as well as this process of self-deification. His Horus name was altered several times during his reign, each change evidently marking a political watershed. Sematawy ('the one who unites the two lands') was the last alteration, the earliest dated occurrence for this being year 39. However, prior to year 39 the king had celebrated his *sed*-festival, and perhaps this was the occasion when he took that name.

The government of the kingdom

Mentuhotep ruled from Thebes, which, until then, had not been a particularly prominent town in Upper Egypt. It was a good location from which to exercise control over the remaining nomarchs (regional governors), and most of Mentuhotep's officials were local men. The scope of their duties was wide: the vizier, Khety, conducted campaigns in Nubia for the king, while the chancellor, Meru, controlled the Eastern Desert and the oases. The latter office was much more significant than it had been in the Old Kingdom. In addition to the existing post of 'governor of Upper Egypt', an equally powerful new post, 'governor of Lower Egypt', was created. This strengthening of the central government increased the king's control over his officials while simultaneously curtailing the power of the nomarchs, who had enjoyed complete independence in the First Intermediate Period.

The numbers of nomarchs were probably reduced by Mentuhotep—the governors of Asyut, for instance, certainly fell from power because of their support for the Herakleopolitan cause. The nomarchs of Beni Hasan and Hermopolis, however, retained control as before, perhaps as their reward for assisting the armies of the Theban nomarchs. The governors of Nag el-Deir, Akhmim, and Deir el-Gebrawi also remained in office. The nomarchs' conduct, however, was monitored by officials from the royal court, who moved around the land at regular intervals.

Another indication of a return to a strong and united Egyptian government is found in the journeys being taken beyond Egyptian borders. One of the famous expedition leaders of this time was Khety (the official depicted on the Shatt el-Rigal relief described above), who patrolled the Sinai area and also carried out assignments in Aswan. Henenu, the 'overseer of horn, hoof, feather and scale', was the king's steward; amid his numerous jobs, he travelled as far as Lebanon for

cedar for his master. Such journeys suggest that Egypt was beginning to restore its influence in the outside world.

The building projects of Mentuhotep II

In addition to the numerous military campaigns launched by Mentuhotep in his fifty-one-year reign, he was also responsible for numerous building projects, although most of these have been destroyed. New temples and chapels were erected, the majority of these being located in Upper Egypt at Dendera, Gebelein, Abydos, Tod, Armant, Elkab, Karnak, and Aswan. A combined Dutch and Russian team has discovered a Middle Kingdom temple near Qantir, in the eastern Delta. Its architecture reflects that of Mentuhotep's mortuary complex at Deir el-Bahri, but firm dates have not been published.

Throughout the Middle Kingdom, the royal cemeteries were continually evolving, not only architecturally, but structurally and spatially. This constant change seems to reflect the search for a spiritual solution to the question of what constituted the most effective type of tomb, and this is very evident in Mentuhotep's mortuary monument, at Deir el-Bahri in western Thebes. This was by far the most impressive of his surviving buildings, although little remains of it today. The temple design was unique, for neither of his 11th-Dynasty successors (Sankhkara Mentuhotep III and Nebtawyra Mentuhotep IV) completed their tombs, while the 12th-Dynasty kings chose monuments inspired by Old Kingdom models. The *saff*-tomb (see Chapter 6) had been the tomb design used by previous Theban rulers in the el-Tarif region of western Thebes, but Mentuhotep's monument altered this tradition. Even though some of its architects seem to have been previously involved in the construction of *saff*-tombs, his complex reveals a vision previously absent from both the Theban and Herakleopolitan models; therefore it is rightly recognized as the most important building of the phase between the end of the Old Kingdom and the beginning of the 12th Dynasty.

This inspiring symbol of the reunification of Egypt epitomized a new beginning. It was, for example, the first royal structure overtly to stress Osirian beliefs—a reflection of the religious 'levelling' between the funerary cults of kings and commoners that had taken place in the First Intermediate Period. Significant innovations in this temple were the use of terraces, and the verandah-like walkways (or ambulatories) that were added onto the central edifice. The design incorporated groves of sycamore and tamarisk trees, which were planted in front of the temple, each in a pit cut 10 m. down into the rock and filled with

soil. A long, unroofed causeway ran up from this tree-lined court to the upper terrace, upon which the central edifice was built. This main construction may have taken the form of a square *mastaba*-tomb (perhaps surmounted by a hill); behind it lay a hypostyle hall and the intimate cult centre.

The tombs of the king's wives, Queens Neferu and Tem, were included in the complex, the latter being buried in a dromos tomb at the rear of his temple, the former in a separate rock-cut tomb on the northern temenos wall in the forecourt. Several chapels and tombs for six other women, four of whom are named as 'royal wife', were found behind the central edifice, within the western walkway. Their original burials belong to the earliest phase of Mentuhotep's temple. When excavated, several of these tombs still contained their original burials, as well as the earliest evidence for the use of models depicting both the coffins and the bodies of the deceased—the precursors of the *shabti* figures that became more popular at a later date. These women buried in the western walkway seem to have been of lower status than Neferu and Tem, and all of them were young: the eldest, Ashaiyet, was 22, and the youngest, Mayt (whose badly destroyed chapel contains no indications of the title of 'wife'), was only a 5-year-old child. The significance of these less-important wives is uncertain; they may have been the daughters of nobles whom the king wished to keep in check, but most of them are named as priestesses of Hathor; therefore it has also been suggested that their tombs may have formed part of a Hathoric cult for the king within his mortuary monument. Another enigma is that the burials appear to be contemporaneous. Did these young girls die together in some disaster?

The six women's chapel tombs evidently belong to the same period in the development of the Deir el-Bahri monument as the tomb known as the Bab el-Hosan, which lies beneath the temple forecourt. This royal tomb is thought by Dieter Arnold to have been an earlier and incomplete burial for the king. It was in this structure that a black-skinned statue in festival robes was found. The unusual skin colour is another of the many references to Osiris, symbolizing the fertility and regenerative powers of Mentuhotep II.

Although the temple was decorated throughout, not enough of its art has survived to be able confidently to reconstruct the overall system of design and decoration, although there are some distinct themes. The king's supernatural and Osirian aspects are emphasized, but there are also scenes from court life. The regional nature of the artwork is evident in many of the surviving fragments of painted decoration, and

such characteristic touches as thick lips, large eyes, and exaggeratedly thin and awkward bodies are all apparent. However, there is also some masterly carving (especially that from the chapels of the young wives), which is more typical of the Memphite school. This mixture of techniques reflects the political situation indicated by some of the craftsmen's biographies, which also show that they came from various regions of Egypt, bringing with them their local traditions. In time, the Memphite style prevailed, but it was several generations before it replaced the regional artistic genres throughout Egypt.

Although we cannot point to any monuments of Mentuhotep II in the Temple of Amun at Karnak, there is a reference to the god in Mentuhotep's temple, and the location of the latter in the curve of the cliffs at Deir el-Bahri is itself significant, being directly aligned with Karnak on the opposite bank. This position may have been intended to allow the king's funerary cult to benefit from the annual visit of the god Amun to Deir el-Bahri in a rite known as the Beautiful Festival of the Valley. Certainly, the cult of Amun began to grow at Thebes from this time onwards.

Mentuhotep III and IV

Queen Tem was the mother of Sankhkara Mentuhotep III (c.2004–1992 BC), who was an energetic builder. In 1997 a Hungarian team led by Györö Vörös not only discovered a hitherto unknown Coptic sanctuary below the peak of Thoth Hill, on the west bank at Thebes, but also found an early Middle Kingdom tomb that surely belonged to Mentuhotep III. Its architecture may have been the inspiration for the *bab*-tombs of the early 18th Dynasty.

The reign of Mentuhotep III was characterized by a certain amount of architectural innovation, including a triple sanctuary at the site of Medinet Habu, which foreshadowed the 18th-Dynasty temples to 'family' triads. In addition, the remains of the brick temple that he constructed on the 'hill of Thoth', the highest peak overlooking the Valley of the Kings, not only contained another triple shrine but also incorporated the earliest surviving examples of temple pylons. Not far from the temple lie the remains of the *sed*-festival palace of Mentuhotep III.

The art preserved from his brief reign is no less innovative, with the relief sculpture arguably reaching its peak for the Middle Kingdom at this point. The carving of the stone is extremely fine, the raised relief conveying tremendous spatial depth with a differentiation of no more than a few millimetres of thickness within the stone. The subtlety of

the portraiture and details within clothing on his reliefs from Tod are far superior to the sculptures of Mentuhotep II.

Mentuhotep III was also the first Middle Kingdom ruler to send an expedition to the East African land of Punt to obtain incense, although such expeditions to the Red Sea and Punt became more frequent in the 12th Dynasty. Mentuhotep's expedition, led by an official called Henenu, was sent via the Wadi Hammamat, thus apparently necessitating the construction of ships on the shores of the Red Sea using timbers that had been transported across with them. He also attempted to protect the north-eastern border through the construction of fortifications in the eastern Delta.

When Mentuhotep III died, in about 1992 BC, there seem to have been 'seven empty years', corresponding to the reign of Nebtawyra Mentuhotep IV (who perhaps usurped the throne, since he is missing from the king-lists). His mother was a commoner with no royal titles other than 'king's mother', so he may not even have been a member of the royal family.

Little is known of Mentuhotep IV's reign, except for his quarrying expeditions. Inscriptions from the Hatnub travertine quarry suggest that some of the nomarchs in Middle Egypt might have been troublesome at about this time. The most important event attested from his reign was the sending of a quarrying expedition into the Wadi Hammamat. Amenemhat, the vizier who led the expedition, ordered the cutting of an inscription at the quarry to record two remarkable omens that the party were said to have witnessed. The first was a gazelle who gave birth to her calf on the stone that had been chosen for the lid of the king's sarcophagus, and the second was a ferocious rainstorm that, when it died down, disclosed a well, 10 cubits square, full of water to the brim. In such barren terrain, this would certainly have been a spectacular, even miraculous, discovery. It seems almost certain that the man who became the first king of the 12th Dynasty was this same Amenemhat. Like most of the 11th-Dynasty high officials, he would have held various powerful posts; it may have been either the weakness of the king or the lack of a viable male heir that caused the throne to pass to the vizier.

The 12th Dynasty

The much greater sophistication of the 12th Dynasty, compared with the 11th, is perhaps the factor that has persuaded so many scholars that the Middle Kingdom only properly begins with the 12th Dynasty.

Amenemhat I

Sehetepibra Amenemhat I (Manetho's 'Ammenemes', c.1985–1956 BC) was the son of a man called Senusret and a woman called Nefret, who came from outside the royal family, and the names Amenemhat, Senusret, and Nefret were later to become popular with the 12th-Dynasty kings and their wives. If Amenemhat the vizier really was the same person as Amenemhat I, then his reporting of the two miracles would appear to signal that he was the one for whom miracles were performed. His contemporaries must have understood that this man had been favoured by the gods.

The Prophecy of Neferty, a text which may have been composed at about the time of the beginning of the reign of Amenemhat I, starts with a list of problems in the land, then 'predicts' the emergence of a strong king:

Then a king will come from the South,
 Ameny, the justified, by name,
 Son of a woman of Ta-Seti, child of Upper Egypt.
 He will take the white crown,
 He will wear the red crown;
 He will join the Two Mighty Ones [the two crowns]

 Asiatics will fall to his sword,
 Libyans will fall to his flame,
 Rebels to his wrath, traitors to his might,
 As the serpent on his brow subdues the rebels for him.
 One will build the Walls-of-the-Ruler,
 To bar Asiatics from entering Egypt . . .

Since this early 12th-Dynasty 'prophecy' (the date of which is very questionable) clearly refers to King Amenemhat, we once again have a statement of divine intervention, calling attention to the king's supernatural status. There are a number of other texts that refer to the chaos before the arrival of new kings; however, the references to the Asiatics in *The Prophecy of Neferty* are new, as is the reference to the Walls-of-the-Ruler, a structure built by Amenemhat across the eastern approach to Egypt. It was during his reign that the first definitely attested Middle Kingdom military campaigns against the Near East were undertaken.

One of Amenemhat's most significant moves was to transfer Egypt's capital from Thebes to the new town of Amenemhat-itj-tawy ('Amenemhat the seizer of the two lands'), sometimes known simply as Itjtawy, a still-undiscovered site in the Faiyum region, probably near the Lisht necropolis. The name of the city implies a rather violent

beginning to the reign, but the precise date of the transfer to Itjtawy is not known. Most scholars argue that it occurred at the beginning of Amenemhat's reign, although Dorothea Arnold advocates a date much later in his reign (around the twentieth year). While a case can be made for Amenemhat spending some years at Thebes, the fact that the building preparations on the platform near Deir el-Bahri identified as a possible tomb for Amenemhat I probably only took about three to five years suggests that the move may not have been as late as the twentieth year of his reign. The negligible number of Theban monuments constructed by Amenemhat I, and the suspicious absence of official burials after the time of Meketra (a high official buried in the vicinity of the above-mentioned platform), may suggest that the move took place in the earlier years of his reign. On the other hand, inscriptions on the foundation blocks of Amenemhat's mortuary temple at Lisht show firstly that Amenemhat I had already celebrated his royal jubilee, and, secondly, that year 1 of an unnamed king (thought to be Amenemhat's successor Senusret I) had already elapsed, thus suggesting an extremely late date for the Lisht pyramid complex. For these reasons, the date of the move to the Faiyum is still a source of considerable debate.

The site of Itjtawy may have been chosen because it was closer to the source of Asiatic incursions than Thebes had been, but it was also politically wise for Amenemhat to found a new capital, thus signalling a new beginning. It also meant that the officials who served him at Itjtawy would have been entirely dependent on the king rather than having their own power bases. This new beginning was celebrated in the king's second choice of Horus name, Wehemmesu ('the renaissance', or, more literally, 'the repeating of births', perhaps an allusion to the first of the 'miracles'). This was no empty phrase: the 12th Dynasty looked back to the Old Kingdom for its models (for example, the pyramidal form of the king's tomb and the use of Old Kingdom styles of artistic decoration) and also promoted the cult of the ruler. There was a steady but inexorable return to a more centralized government, together with an increase in the bureaucracy. There was also an exponential growth in the mineral wealth of the king, emphasized by the jewellery caches found in several 12th-Dynasty royal burials. These changes resulted in rising living standards for middle-class Egyptians, whose level of wealth was proportional to their official posts.

Amenemhat's earliest use of the feudal armies was against Asiatics in the Delta; the scale of these operations is unknown. He then strengthened the region with the construction of the so-called

Walls-of-the-Ruler, which play a dramatic role in the *Story of Sinuhe* and are also mentioned in the *Prophecy of Neferty*. No fortress of this date has yet been discovered at the north-eastern frontier of Egypt, but the remains of a large canal may date from this period. Other fortresses are known to have been constructed elsewhere in Amenemhat's reign, including one named Rawaty at Mendes, and the outposts of Semna and Quban in Nubia, the purpose of which was mainly to protect and service the gold mines in Wadi Allaqi.

Although the king and his conscript army pushed southwards as far as Elephantine quite early in his reign, they do not appear to have been active any further south before year 29. By this time, the policy towards Nubia had been transformed from the loose network of sporadic trading and quarrying ventures that characterized the the Old Kingdom to a new strategy of conquest and colonization, principally with the aim of obtaining raw materials, especially gold. An inscription at the lower Nubian site of Korosko, midway between the first and second Nile cataracts, states that the people of Wawat (Lower Nubia) were defeated in the twenty-ninth year of Amenemhat's reign. Only one military foray against the Libyans is recorded; this is said to have taken place in year 30, with the army under the command of the king's son Senusret. By the time the Libyan campaign had ended, Amenemhat was dead.

Senusret I

According to Fragment 34 of Manetho's history, a conspiracy took place at the end of Amenemhat's reign. *The Teaching of Amenemhat I* also hints at a dispute over the succession, and it was while Senusret was campaigning in Libya that he was told of his father's death. Amenemhat was almost surely murdered, and a text from Senusret I's times presents the account supposedly spoken by his father from beyond the grave:

It was after supper, when night had fallen, and I had spent an hour of happiness. I was asleep upon my bed, having become weary, and my heart had begun to follow sleep. When weapons of my counsel were wielded, I had become like a snake of the necropolis. As I came to, I awoke to fighting, and I found that it was an attack of the bodyguard. If I had quickly taken weapons in my hand, I would have made the wretches retreat with a charge! But there is none mighty in the night, none who can fight alone; no success will come without a helper. Look, my injury happened while I was without you, when the entourage had not yet heard that I would hand over to you when I had not yet sat with you, that I might make counsels for you; for I did not plan it; I did not foresee it, and my heart had not taken thought of the negligence of servants.

The manuscript from which this brief extract derives is thought to be an early 12th-Dynasty composition, possibly created on behalf of Senusret I to support his claim to the throne. The piece would very well serve as a 'justification' for any punitive measures Senusret might have taken after he gained the throne.

The king-lists give Kheperkara Senusret I (c.1956–1911 BC) a reign of forty-five years, and this situation is backed up by a text at Amada, in Nubia giving a date of year 44 for him. It has been accepted for some time that Senusret I's reign consisted of thirty-five years of sole reign and ten years of a co-regency shared with his father, but this assumption was questioned by Claude Obsomer in 1995. If his claim is correct, then we can at last make sense of the ending of *The Teaching of Amenemhat I*, in which the king requests that Senusret succeed him. This poetic request is only explicable if there had been no co-regency to ensure the smooth transmission of the throne.

Senusret sent one expedition to Nubia, in the tenth year of his reign. Eight years later, he dispatched another army as far south as the second cataract. His general, Mentuhotep, went even further south, but it was the site of Buhen that became Egypt's new southern border. Here Senusret set up a victory stele, and constructed a fort, thus transforming Lower Nubia into a province of Egypt. While Kush (Upper Nubia) was mainly exploited for its gold, the Egyptians were also procuring amethyst, turquoise, copper, and gneiss for jewellery and sculpture. In the north, trading caravans passed between Egypt and Syria, exchanging cedar and ivory for Egyptian goods. These more prolific expeditions into Nubia and Asia show the extent to which foreign policy had changed between the 11th and the 12th Dynasties.

The king's numerous monuments were distributed from lower Nubia in the south to Heliopolis and Tanis in the north, and it was in order to obtain the raw materials for building, decorating, and equipping these constructions that officials were sent to exploit the stone quarries of Wadi Hammamat, Sinai, Hatnub, and Wadi el-Hudi. Just one of these expeditions extracted sufficient rock to make sixty sphinxes and 150 statues. The Egyptian Museum in Cairo includes a large collection of statues of Senusret retrieved from his mortuary temple, but many of his other monuments and statues were remodelled, copied, and replaced by later kings, so that few of the originals have survived. At Thebes, he is considered to have founded the temple of *Ipet sut* (Karnak) and erected an Egyptian alabaster bark shrine celebrating his *sed*-festival in the thirty-first year of his reign. The relief work of his time was particularly fine, judging from such surviving fragments as a

damaged relief figure of the king from Koptos (now in the Petrie Museum, University College London), but his statues lack vivacity and movement, and the portraits are impersonal. Nevertheless, the effect of this flurry of artwork had important results: because of Senusret's long reign, the 'royal style' reached the regions with sufficient force to cast its shadow throughout Egypt, and regional styles steadily retreated before it.

Senusret was the first to introduce a construction programme whereby monuments were set up in each of the main cult sites throughout the land. This move, which was an extension of the policy of later Old Kingdom pharaohs, had the effect of undermining the power bases of local temples and priests. Today there are only a few surviving remnants of the major sculptures and thematic works from these regions, thus reducing our impression of the impact of Senusret's programme. Among his more important measures, Senusret remodelled the temple of Khenti-amentiu-Osiris at Abydos. Following this royal impetus, the king's officials also erected numerous memorial stelae and small shrines (or 'cenotaphs') at Abydos, thus inaugurating a practice that was to become standard for devout men of means in both Middle and New Kingdoms. Because of the attention Senusret paid to the cult of Osiris, there was a great flowering of Osirian beliefs and practices in Egypt, as well as a more significant levelling between the king's belief in the afterlife and the beliefs of his subjects. John Wilson has described this as the 'democratization of the afterlife'.

The 'Hekanakhte papers'

By a stroke of good fortune, a collection of Middle Kingdom letters provide us with many details of agricultural life at about this time. The letters were written by an old farmer named Hekanakhte to his family, while he was absent on business for a considerable period of time. Although this material was, until recently, thought to date to the reign of Mentuhotep III, the fact that the papyri were found in association with pottery of the early 12th Dynasty suggests that they were actually written in the early years of Senusret I.

Hekanakhte's personality emerges from these letters, which are full of sharp commands to his several sons to do his bidding, to stop whingeing about the slender rations he has allowed them, and to be kind to his new wife. The letters provide a most intimate view of family dynamics in the 12th Dynasty, as well as indicating some of the ways in which richer farmers juggled their commitments and crops. They suggest that there was famine in Egypt in Hekanakhte's later years, a

phenomenon also implied by the inscriptions in the roughly contemporary tomb of the nomarch Amenemhat at Beni Hasan (tomb BH 2).

The Hekanakhte papers include a rare letter from a woman to her mother—a find that raises the question of the extent to which ancient Egyptian women were able to read and write. Unfortunately, however, this does not constitute definite proof, given that the woman in question may have dictated the letter to a male scribe (as indeed many illiterate male correspondents would have done) and the style of the handwriting can provide no clues. References elsewhere to two Middle Kingdom female scribes suggest that a few women may nevertheless have been literate at this date.

Royal annals and the reign of Amenemhat II

Further information for the historical events of the 12th Dynasty comes from a set of official records (known as *genut* or ‘day-books’) that have been partly preserved in the temple at Tod. The king’s building dedications also contain elements of these annals; P. Berlin 3029, for instance, describes the process by which the king founded a new building. These are some of the most useful surviving texts in terms of understanding the day-to-day world of the Egyptian palace. In addition, in 1974, the Egyptian Antiquities Organization discovered one of the most important *genut* inscriptions at Mit Rahina (ancient Memphis). Although the inscription mentions Senusret I, it clearly belongs to the reign of his son, Nubkaura Amenemhat II (c.1911–1877 BC). These annals contain very detailed descriptions of donations made to various temples, lists of statues and buildings, reports of both military and trading expeditions, and royal activities such as hunting. It is undoubtedly the most important text of Amenemhat II, but it also refers to other 12th-Dynasty kings; most importantly, it reveals that the superficial ‘peace’ that was said to exist between Asia and Egypt at this time was only selective, with a number of treaties existing between Egypt and various individual Levantine cities. Herodotus’ references to Asiatic wars and to the attitude of contempt held by ‘Sesostris’ towards the Asiatics (*Histories* 2.106) are thus perhaps closer to historical reality than modern readers have tended to believe.

Wall paintings in the tomb of the nomarch Khnumhotep at Beni Hasan (BH 3) depict the visit of a Bedouin chieftain named Abisha, while numerous Egyptian statuettes and scarabs have been found at Near Eastern sites, reaffirming such Asiatic links. There had long been steady commerce with the Syrian port of Byblos, where the native

rulers wrote short inscriptions in hieroglyphs, held the Egyptian titles of count and hereditary prince, referred to Egyptian gods, and acquired Egyptian royal and private statuary. In addition, the above-mentioned Mit Rahina annals of Amenemhat II identify the north Syrian city of Tunip as an Egyptian trading partner. Other Asiatic contacts appear to have been more warlike. The annals refer to a small group of Egyptians entering bedouin territory (probably a region of Sinai) in order to 'hack up the land', and two more operations were directed against unknown walled towns. The victims are described as *Aamu* (Asiatics), and 1,554 of them are said to have been captured as prisoners. These large numbers of foreign captives may well explain the extensive lists of Asiatic slaves working in houses in Thebes in later times. There were also campaigns in the south at this time; thus the 'biography' in the tomb of Amenemhat at Beni Hasan mentions that he went on an expedition to Kush (Upper Nubia) and that the East African kingdom of Punt was visited by the king's official, Khentykhetaywer, in the twenty-eighth year of Amenemhat II.

Unlike so many of the 12th-Dynasty rulers, Amenemhat II does not appear to have had a prolific building record, although this impression may be partly a result of later plundering. His pyramid complex, the so-called White Pyramid at Dahshur (poorly preserved and not yet thoroughly examined), was unique in being set on a platform. His daughters were buried in the forecourt and a queen called Keminebu was also buried within the complex. It was long thought that Keminebu was Amenemhat's wife, but it is now recognized, on the basis of her name and the style of her inscriptions, that she was actually a 13th-Dynasty queen.

Senusret II and the inauguration of the Faiyum irrigation system

The reign of Amenemhat II's successor, Khakheperra Senusret II (1877–1870 BC), was a time of peace and prosperity, when trade with the Near East was particularly prolific. There are no records of military campaigns during his reign; instead, his greatest achievement appears to have been the inauguration of the Faiyum irrigation scheme. A dyke was built and canals were dug to connect the Faiyum with the waterway that is now known as the Bahr Yusef. These canals siphoned off some of the waters that normally would have flowed into Lake Moeris, resulting in a gradual evaporation of waters around the edges of the lake, the canals extending the amount of new land; the reclaimed land was then farmed. This was a far-sighted scheme, and would have been unique for its time, if it were not for the fact that land was reclaimed

with a similar system of dams and drainage canals in the Copaic Basin of Boeotia, in central Greece, in the Middle Helladic Period (c.1900–1600 BC).

We do not in fact know how many of these irrigation works are to be ascribed specifically to the reign of Senusret II, but his connection with the overall revival of the Faiyum is probably indicated by the fact that he erected religious monuments at the edge of the region. The unique statue shrine of Qasr el-Sagha in the desert at the north-eastern corner of the Faiyum has been dated to around his reign by associated pottery. Like other buildings of his reign, however, this one was left undecorated and incomplete, thus contributing to the impression that he enjoyed only a short reign. The use of various sites in the Faiyum for royal pyramid complexes from this time onwards perhaps indicates the importance of the irrigation scheme, since it is usually assumed that the royal palaces of each ruler would have been built close to their funerary monuments.

A small group of statues of Senusret II are known, at least two of which were usurped by Rameses II (1279–1213 BC). The wide, muscular shoulders are reminiscent of the statues of Senusret I, although the influence of Old Kingdom royal statuary is also apparent. The facial appearance of Senusret II is more vigorous and plastic, with none of the blandness that typified the statuary of his 12th-Dynasty predecessors: his broad cheekbones and small mouth are very distinctive, and probably indicative of actual portraiture, foreshadowing the startling studies of Senusret III (1870–1831 BC). The customary imitation of a royal trend by the wealthy members of society subsequently occurred, including many vivid examples of individuality among the private statuary of the late 12th Dynasty. The reign of Senusret II perhaps deserves to be regarded as the first major phase of human portraiture in the history of Egyptian art.

Even better known than the king's statuary are a pair of highly polished black granite statues of Queen(?) Nefret now in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo. Larger than life, they depict a royal woman whose position at court is still uncertain. Although Nefret did not hold the title of 'royal wife', she possessed other titles held by queens. Was she perhaps the first wife of Senusret II, who may have died prior to her husband's fairly late accession, or was she his sister? As with many Egyptian queens, the records concerning Nefret are ambiguous and incomplete. In 1995 the remains of his chief wife, Khnumetneferhedjetweret, were discovered in the pyramid of her son (Senusret III) at Dahshur, together with a few items of jewellery.

Senusret II built his funerary complex at Lahun, the pyramid being a massive mud-brick structure with a rocky core; large limestone cross walls provided support for the brick sectors, which were then cased in limestone. Trees were planted at the southern end of the complex, and the entrance to the pyramid was also on the south. The layout of corridors and rooms within the pyramid is unique, and may reflect beliefs concerned with Osiris and the afterlife. It is suspected that another tomb, very well made and situated on the northern side of the complex (Tomb 621), could be a cenotaph like those in Old Kingdom royal complexes. The female members of the king's family may be represented by eight solid *mastaba*-tombs and a satellite pyramid; all of them were aligned with the northern side of the king's tomb, but they were apparently symbolic structures rather than actual burial places. In a shaft tomb at the southern end of the king's pyramid enclosure, the jewellery and other possessions of Princess Sathathoriunet were found by Petrie and Brunton in 1914; the workmanship of these pieces is among the best in the entire repertoire of Egyptian jewellery.

Nubian conquest under Senusret III

Although the Turin Canon gives Khakaura Senusret III (c.1870–1831 BC) a reign of over thirty years, the latest regnal year recorded by dated sources is 19. On the other hand, discoveries during the 1990s may support the longer date (see chronological discussion at the beginning of the chapter). There is no real evidence for a co-regency with Senusret II, but if one could be proven it would help resolve some difficulties caused by the unusually long reign.

Senusret is perhaps the most 'visible' monarch of the Middle Kingdom: his exploits gathered renown over time and substantially contributed to the character of 'Sesostris' (a kind of composite heroic Middle Kingdom ruler) described by Manetho and Herodotus. The king campaigned in Nubia in regnal years 6, 8, 10, and 16, and these wars appear to have been very brutal: Nubian men were killed, their women and children enslaved, their fields burnt, and their wells poisoned. Soon after this, the Egyptians were again mining and trading with the inhabitants, but conditions had changed. In the eighth and sixteenth regnal years, stelae were set up in the fortresses of Semna and Uronarti, at what appears to have been the southern border, with their inscriptions reminding everyone of Senusret's conquest and punishments. This frontier region was sealed off by reinforcing the huge fortresses, and guards were placed on round-the-

clock duty, waiting for any movement. The year 8 stele at Semna states that no Nubians are allowed to take their herds or boats to the north of the specified border.

These forts emphasize the unsettled nature of the Egyptian control of Nubia. The so-called Semna dispatches—a set of military letters and accounts sent from Semna to Thebes in the 13th Dynasty—reveal just how rigorously the Egyptians policed the native people. They also show how closely these forts kept in contact with each other. Although the major forts were of comparable size, they fulfilled several different functions. Some, such as Mirgissa, were more involved with trade than others (bread and beer were exchanged for the native goods), while some (such as Askut) appear to have been used as supply depots for campaigns into Upper Nubia. Reports were sent backwards and forwards from the forts to the vizier, and in this way the king kept in touch with the limits of his domain. Senusret's final Nubian campaign, in year 19, was of lengthy duration and it was ultimately not particularly successful: the king had to retreat when the water level in the river dropped alarmingly, making journeys dangerous.

He undertook at least one campaign into Palestine, apparently similar to the expedition sent by Amenemhat II against the *Aamu* (Asiatics). There appear to have been large numbers of Asiatics in Egypt by this date; some of them were prisoners taken earlier, but the biblical account of Joseph's brothers selling him as a slave to an Egyptian master (Gen. 37: 28–36) may suggest another way in which some of these immigrants arrived. Egyptian intolerance toward the 'easterners' was already apparent in the reign of Senusret I, who described himself as 'the throat-slitter of Asia', and this general perception is reinforced by the so-called execration texts. These were lists of enemies inscribed on pottery objects and figurines, many of which name individual Asiatics and the people of Asia in general. The intention of the texts seems to have been to ensure the magical destruction of Egypt's enemies by burying or smashing the pots or figurines in question.

Senusret also took a different direction in his political reforms. Although he has often been credited with the dismantling of the system of nomarchs, there is no real evidence to support this assertion (see section on political change below). Nevertheless, his attempts to pull Egypt back into a more centralized form of government resulted in significant political and social readjustment (especially for the middle classes), and his reign is quite rightly regarded as a crucial watershed in Middle Kingdom history.

The tomb of Senusret III, a 60-metre-high mud-brick pyramid, cased with limestone blocks, was located at Dahshur, like that of Amenemhat II. *Mastaba*-tombs were built for his immediate family within the temenos wall, but their real burials lay below ground in galleries, one level for queens, the other for princesses. Dieter Arnold has shown that this complex takes some of its ideas from the 3rd-Dynasty step-pyramid complex of Djoser at Saqqara. The burial chamber has a vaulted ceiling and is built of granite plastered over with white gypsum. Neither the king's chamber nor the sarcophagus appears to have been used. However, at the southern end of Abydos a second funerary complex was constructed for Senusret, consisting of a subterranean tomb and a mortuary temple, where a cult for the king lasted for over two centuries. Some scholars suspect that the Abydos complex may have been his actual burial place, but no remains were found there either.

Amenemhat III: the cultural climax of the Middle Kingdom

Senusret's only known son was Nimaatra Amenemhat III (c.1831–1786 BC). It was arguably around the time of his long and peaceful reign that the Middle Kingdom reached its cultural peak. Consolidation of what had gone before appears to have been the hallmark of Amenemhat's style of government. He strengthened the Semna border and enlarged some of the fortresses. Other building works included numerous shrines and temples, and a huge structure at Biahmu (in the north-western Faiyum), featuring two colossal quartzite seated statues of the king facing onto the lake, which was later described by Herodotus (2. 149). He also constructed a large temple to Sobek at another Faiyum site, Kiman Faras (Crocodilopolis), and expanded the Ptah temple at Memphis. The surviving statues of Amenemhat III are striking, distinguished both by their originality and their workmanship, as in the case of a small head of the king now in the collection of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, which is one of the most elegant and subtle of his many portraits. His so-called Hyksos sphinxes and parts of shrines were found reused in the Third Intermediate Period temples at Tanis, as were the twin black granite statues of the king in the guise of the Nile god, bringing offerings of fish, lotus flowers, and geese—a design later imitated by such New Kingdom rulers as Amenhotep III (1390–1352 BC).

Numerous inscriptions record Amenemhat III's mining activities. In the Sinai region alone, where the king's officials worked the turquoise and copper mines on a quasi-permanent basis, fifty-nine graf-

fiti have been identified. The quarries at Wadi Hammamat, Tura, Aswan, and various Nubian sites were also worked. All this building and industrial activity symbolizes the prosperity that Egypt enjoyed during the reign, but it may also have exhausted the economy and, combined with a series of low Nile floods, late in his reign, resulted in political and economic decline. Ironically, the large intake of Asiatics, which seems to have occurred partly in order to subsidize the extensive building work, may have encouraged the so-called Hyksos to settle in the Delta, thus leading eventually to the collapse of native Egyptian rule.

Before the construction of the modern dams at Aswan and the creation of Lake Nasser, the annual Nile inundation was critical for Egypt's food supply. Amenemhat's records of inundation levels at Kumma and Semna in Nubia are numerous, revealing extremely high levels for the Nile during part of his reign, the highest being in year 30, when it reached 5.1 m. But these levels subsequently tapered away sharply, so that in year 40 the level was only 0.5 m. Such fluctuations must have had a destabilizing effect on the economy. Since the Faiyum is the only oasis in Egypt dependent upon the Nile, the Faiyum irrigation scheme would have needed to draw on some of the annual flood water, thus perhaps explaining the king's apparent intense interest in the flood levels. Alternatively, the high Niles may have been closely watched in order to allow possible flood damage in the north to be averted. Amenemhat III certainly maintained the Faiyum scheme, and later peoples worshipped him as Lamares, the god of the Faiyum, but, as with Senusret II, it is not clear just how much hydraulic work was undertaken in his particular reign. His deification may have taken place as early as the reign of his successor, Queen Sobekneferu, for she had the most to gain from elevating the man who was probably her own father.

Amenemhat built his first pyramid at Dahshur, but, as in the case of the 4th-Dynasty Bent Pyramid of Sneferu, cracks appear to have developed in the structure during building. The finished pyramid had a mud-brick core and was originally encased in limestone (now robbed); its stone pyramidion is in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo. The remains of Queen Aat and another royal woman were found in two recently discovered corridors inside the south-western section of the pyramid. Their crypts were provided with separate entrances outside the pyramid, a feature that would have enabled access after the main entrance to the pyramid had been sealed. Queen Aat's sarcophagus is identical to that of the king.

The two queens' burial chambers at Dahshur each included a separate 'ka chamber' where the canopic chests were placed. This was a type of funerary room that had once been the privilege of kings, thus presumably representing a rather specialized aspect of the so-called democratization of the afterlife (see section on religion below); it is likely that these chambers expressed new beliefs concerning the afterlife of royal women. Their corridors were linked with the king's, and they would have shared the tomb with him if it had not been for the structural faults that developed.

Amenemhat's final resting place, however, was at Hawara in the south-eastern Faiyum. His most famous monument was the mortuary temple attached to this pyramid, which may have been reminiscent of Djoser's *sed*-festival court, attached to his pyramid at Saqqara. The Hawara temple became known as the Labyrinth because of its maze of rooms and corridors. Although described by six classical writers, including Herodotus (2. 148–9), Strabo (17. I. 3, 37, 42) and Pliny (*Natural History* 36. 13), no details of its plan were coherent even when Petrie made his survey in 1888; therefore efforts at reconstructing its original appearance have been unsuccessful. Amenemhat's burial chamber at Hawara was originally intended to be shared with Princess Neferuptah, who was probably his sister, but she was later transferred to a small, separate pyramid (now almost totally destroyed by stone-robbers and water damage) a few kilometres away. The prominence of Neferuptah both during his reign and after her death, together with the mortuary privileges provided for her and for the two queens at Dahshur, suggests the increased status of royal women in the late 12th Dynasty.

Amenemhat IV and Sobekneferu

Given the long reign of Amenemhat III, there is a possibility that Maakherura Amenemhat IV (1786–1777 BC) might have been his grandson, but it is also possible that this last male ruler of Dynasty XII was an aged son whose life was nearing its end when he came to the throne, for he ruled for only nine years. He is likely to have been married to Queen Sobekkara Sobekneferu (1777–1773 BC), whom Manetho says was his sister. Few of his monuments have been preserved and little is known of events during his reign, which may have been primarily occupied in completing several temples begun by his predecessor, such as the limestone sanctuary of the harvest goddess, Renenutet, at Medinet Maadi in the south-western Faiyum. There were also continued expeditions to the turquoise mines in Sinai and further trade with the Levant.

There are only a handful of records relating to the last ruler of the 12th Dynasty, Queen Sobekneferu, but some of them offer very interesting clues relating to her reign. She is listed in the Turin Canon; there is a Nile graffito at the Nubian fortress of Kumma giving the height of inundation at 1.83 m. in the third year of her reign; and there is a fine cylinder seal bearing her name and titulary, which is now in the British Museum. Usually, the queen uses feminine titles, but several masculine ones were also used. Three headless statues of the queen were found in the Faiyum, and a few other items contain her name. She contributed to Amenemhat III's 'Labyrinth', and also built at Herakleopolis Magna.

There is an interesting, but damaged statue of the queen of unknown origin; the costume on this figure is unique in its combination of elements from male and female dress, echoing her occasional use of male titles in her records. This ambiguity might have been a deliberate attempt to mollify the critics of a female ruler. An intriguing statuette of Sobekneferu in the Metropolitan Museum, New York shows the queen wearing a *sed*-festival cloak and a most unusual crown, which may have resulted from the attempt to combine unfamiliar iconographic elements of male and female rulers. The queen's reign lasted for less than four years, and her tomb—like Amenemhat IV's—has not yet been identified.

The 13th Dynasty

The rulers of the 13th Dynasty continued to use Itjtawy as their capital, and carried on the policies of the 12th-Dynasty rulers; but the new dynasty was made up of different lineages, and the question of how the king might have been chosen is unresolved. Stephen Quirke has suggested a 'circulating succession' among leading families, which would help to account for the great brevity of most of the reigns. Nevertheless, the bureaucracy continued to function in the same way as it had done throughout the 12th Dynasty. The Egyptians still controlled the area around the second Nile cataract, Nile floods were measured, trade still flourished, and royal monuments continued to be built (although these were far less impressive than those of the great 12th-Dynasty kings). The visual arts, on the other hand, show no alterations in finesse or style from the best of the 12th-Dynasty pieces. This continuity—broken at times—lasted until the reign of Neferhotep I.

Although many 13th-Dynasty names have been recorded in the Turin Canon, we know little about the individual rulers. Wegaf Khuta-

wyra was the first, followed by Khutawy-Sekhemra Sobekhotep II. After the reign of the third king, Sankhtawy-Sekhemra Iykhernefert-Neferhotep, Nile records were not kept for some time, and it is possible that this might have been a period of political unrest: it is perhaps significant that there are also few records during this time at the Sinai turquoise mines. Nevertheless, trading contacts continued, and the ruler of Byblos still described himself as the 'servant of Egypt'. Sealings from the Nubian forts show that affairs to the south ran as before. It is to this period that King Awibra Hor belongs; his burial—a mere shaft tomb—was discovered by Jacques de Morgan in the mortuary complex of Amenemhat III at Dahshur. In spite of the cultural continuity remarked above, nothing so clearly expresses the reduced circumstances of the rulers at this time as the impoverished nature of the tomb of Awibra Hor.

After this brief, unsettled period, a series of less ephemeral kings emerged, including Sekhemra-Khutawy Sobekhotep II, to whose reign is dated a most interesting papyrus revealing details of Theban court life for a period of twelve days. Stephen Quirke's analysis of this document (Papyrus Bulaq 18) has revealed a great deal about the hierarchical structure of the 13th-Dynasty palace and its *modus operandi*. Some four reigns later, in about 1744 BC, Sekhemra-Sewadjtawy Sobekhotep III became king, and for a time it seemed that there would be a revival in the fortunes of Egyptian rulers. A relief carved in the cliff above Nag Hammadi, in Middle Egypt, provides very specific information about members of the king's family. His highest regnal date was year 5, although the Turin Canon gives him only three years and two months; despite this brevity, he left dated inscriptions on monuments from the Delta site of Bubastis down to Elephantine in the south.

Sobekhotep III's successor, Khasekhemra Neferhotep I (c.1740–1729 BC), was also evidently of non-royal stock, but he too left many monumental records, suggesting that his reign was a vigorous one. He was acknowledged as overlord by Inten, the ruler of Byblos, and his inscriptions have been found as far south as the island of Konosso, just south of the first cataract in Nubia. Despite these tokens of strength, however, he was not in control of the entire Egyptian kingdom, judging from the evidence of local rulers governing independently at Xoïs and Avaris in the Delta.

The throne passed to the two brothers of Neferhotep I, Sahathor and Sobekhotep IV, followed by the brief reign of the son of Sobekhotep IV. This mini-dynasty ended with Sobekhotep V in about 1723 BC. Nevertheless, enough evidence has survived of the reign of Sobekho-

tep IV to suggest that he had all the hallmarks of a strong king, and continued to hold some control over Nubia, where two of the king's statues were found south of the third cataract (other statues of this king survived reused at Tanis). It was, however, during the reign of Sobekhotep IV that the first signs of revolt emerged in Nubia, which was eventually to slip out of Egyptian control, to be ruled instead by a line of Nubian kings based at Kerma (see Chapter 8). By that time, Middle Kingdom Egypt had broken up into those spheres of interest that formed the basis for government in the Second Intermediate Period.

Processes of Political Change in the Middle Kingdom

Government in the Middle Kingdom was loosely based on the structure created under the Old Kingdom, but there were significant variations. The bureaucracy and the Crown were supported by taxation, although little direct information concerning the latter has survived from Middle Kingdom sources. The fiscal system was essentially based on assessment of yields from lands and waterways, and paid in kind. Temples and other pious foundations were often tax exempt in part, if not in full (see below). In addition, there was a system of enforced labour, whereby men and women of the middle and lower classes were enlisted to undertake specific physical tasks, including military service. This *corvée* system was organized through town officials, but there was central control under the office of the 'organization of labour'. Although it was possible to escape the burden of the work legitimately by paying another person to do it, those who avoided the *corvée* altogether were punished very severely, and their families, or anyone aiding their evasion, were also punished. Records from the fortress at Askut in Lower Nubia show that this was one place to which evaders of the *corvée* could be sent; no doubt other defaulters were sent to the quarry regions.

The *corvée* practice continued into the 17th Dynasty, and only the people of Nubia appear to have been exempt from both taxation and *corvée* impositions. For its part, the government kept the peace at home and patrolled the borders north of the second cataract and west of the Walls-of-the-Ruler. By means of raids into Palestine, and campaigns in Nubia, the Middle Kingdom rulers were able to extend Egypt's influence and prosperity. Trade was the king's monopoly, supervised by state officials, and in Nubia the rewards were extremely substantial.

Many of the titles held by Middle Kingdom officials were the same as those used in the Old Kingdom, but there were also a number of additional posts. One of the noticeable characteristics of the Middle Kingdom was a refining of official titles into more specific offices and duties, which must have been part of a general growth in the bureaucracy, although the range of activities within each office would have become more restricted. An exception to this narrowing of duties was that of 'royal sealbearer', who was given wide supervisory duties, especially under Mentuhotep II. The vizier, whose responsibilities are enumerated in a New Kingdom funerary text from the tomb of Rekhmira (*The Duties of the Vizier*), was still the chief minister under the king, albeit less prominently in the records after the 11th Dynasty. The practice of having two viziers is uncertain for the Middle Kingdom, although under Senusret I there do seem to have been two (Antefoker and Mentuhotep) who were serving at the same time.

The scant source material of the later Middle Kingdom suggests that there were other political changes between the Old and Middle Kingdoms: central government in the Middle Kingdom was much more pervasive in the regional areas (whereas there is little evidence for this in the Old Kingdom). There was also more control over individuals and the obligation that each was deemed to owe the government. This more intense intrusion into private life may be partially attributed to the Middle Kingdom custom of delegating so much local control to the mayors of the towns, but there was a marked change, too, in bringing the provinces into line with the styles and practices of the capital. Artwork is the most visible indicator of this phenomenon.

It was, however, the office of nomarch that experienced the widest fluctuation of all during the Middle Kingdom. Thanks to their distance from Memphis, the earlier nomarchs had always enjoyed a certain amount of independence in the Old Kingdom. This independence was strengthened by the collapse of the Memphite government, and a major goal of the Middle Kingdom rulers was to minimize it. Different kings chose different strategies to effect their policy.

Under Mentuhotep II the nomarchs were retained in many of the areas for which we have records (although much of this kind of evidence has not survived), but it appears that those nomarchs considered unhelpful to the Thebans would have automatically lost their positions. Throughout the 11th Dynasty the nomarchs played their traditional roles, but they were now supervised by the king's officials. Many of those who retained power still had delusions of grandeur: Count Nehry of the Hermopolite nome, for instance, dated his inscriptions to

his own 'reign' during the time of Mentuhotep IV, and his statements at the Hatnub quarry strongly suggest challenges to the king.

The basic plan adopted by Amenemhat I was to make the individual town the focus of administration. Each town was controlled by a mayor, and only the chief official in the most important towns inherited the position of nomarch. With this concentration on the city as the basic unit of government, the political impact of the larger region of the nome now declined. Amenemhat I's nomarchs held the titles of 'great overlord, mayor and overseer of priests', and were mainly located in the central and border regions of Egypt. The key factor in royal control over these men seems to have been the fact that, in the first two 12th-Dynasty reigns at least, they were all personally appointed by the king (although by the time of Amenemhat II the office had once more become hereditary).

Such nomarchs made the most of their positions, some of them adapting titles for their own staff that imitated those at the royal court: one can find here and there a 'treasurer', a 'chancellor', and even an army captain in household retinues. Despite these pretensions, the great overlords were not allowed to forget their benefactor, the king, who had organized them in quasi-feudal fashion: they owed him direct allegiance and, in return for royal favours, they were obliged to protect the borders of Egypt, to undertake expeditions for the king, and probably to act as deputies for official receptions of foreigners, such as the arrival of the Bedouin traders in the Oryx nome, depicted in the tomb of Khnumhotep at Beni Hasan (BH 3), in the reign of Amenemhat II.

The main title of the nomarch, 'great overlord', disappeared about the time of Senusret III, and the conventional view is that this happened as a result of *force majeure* by the king. The real reason, however, is likely to have been somewhat different: by the time of Senusret III, only the nomarchs of el-Bersha and Elephantine are still definitely recorded as holders of the office of 'great overlord' (other areas were controlled by mayors, but records of many towns are missing, so we cannot be entirely certain). Detlef Franke has demonstrated that the practice under Senusret II was for the king to educate the sons of nomarchs in the capital, and then to give them appointments either at the capital or in other areas. With the family scions dissipated in this way, the office of nomarch would eventually have been eclipsed by that of the town mayors, who would inevitably not have enjoyed the same material wealth and power as the provincial governors. This would explain why the era of richly decorated provincial tombs came to an end. Senusret III is thus unlikely to have been the instrument of the

nomarchs' demise, for the record shows that, although the office eventually expired under Senusret III, it had been in decline since at least the time of Amenemhat II.

Nevertheless, Senusret III did install other officials (based at the royal court) as governors of very large sections of the country, and in this way made a sharp break with practices of the past. Two bureaus (*waret*) were created, one each for the northern and southern areas of Egypt, operated by a hierarchy of officials. Other departments, such as the 'treasury', the 'bureau of the people's giving', and the 'organization of labour', were also inaugurated. The military sector was organized under a chief general, and there was a new 'bureau of the vizier'. In addition to these state departments, there was a separate administration for the palace. As a result of this new hierarchy, there were also fresh titles, and a corresponding increase in the size of the middle-class bureaucracy, which was reflected in greater numbers of funerary stelae for this period, a visible marker of the greater affluence of the middle class.

Outside the governmental boundaries were the estates of the temple and its dependencies. As the contracts for the mayor Djefahapy of Asyut reveal, this was an equally bureaucratic world. Djefahapy's ten contracts—which have survived because they were inscribed on an inner wall of his tomb—were drawn up to ensure that his mortuary cult would be maintained after his death. Apart from the legal implications, the contracts also reveal some of the other conditions applying to the temple, such as the fact that each person in the district was required to give the temple a *hekat* (nearly 5 litres) of grain from every field on his property on the occasion of the first harvest each year. The contracts are very specific, indicating that the temples were self-supporting, and that they too had to pay taxes to the Crown, unless they received an exemption decree from the king. Senusret I's policy of building provincial temples throughout the land effectively reduced the local temples' power bases.

The Royal Court

Very few explicit statements concerning the role of the pharaoh have survived from the Old Kingdom, but there are some Middle Kingdom texts that shed light on the nature of kingship, such as *The Teachings for Merykara*, *The Teaching of Amenemhat I*, and the *Hymns to Senusret III*. Some private records, too, can provide insights, as in the case of a long

poem on the stele of Sehetepibra from Abydos (Egyptian Museum, Cairo), which describes the importance of the king to his people.

The concluding episodes of *The Tale of Sinuhe* (describing the return of an Egyptian courtier from exile) supply details of 12th-Dynasty court life, but it is the 13th-Dynasty Papyrus Bulaq 18 that provides the most revealing evidence concerning the social hierarchy of the royal family and the quantities of daily rations given out, thus indicating the relative importance of these and other palace dependants. This papyrus also indicates the fluidity of the movements of different people, with their sojourns away from the palace proper. With regard to the palace complex itself, the papyrus indicates that there were three inner divisions within its precincts. In descending order of importance, these were: the *kap*, or nursery, which was the domain of the royal family, their personal servants and select children being educated at the king's expense; the *wahy*, or audience area of the columned hall, a place where banquets were held; and the *khenty*, or outer palace, where the business of the court was conducted. These three groups of buildings were set within a less august area known as the *shena*, where provisions were handed out to the palace dependants. The vizier and senior officials occupied the *khenty*, while serving staff were restricted to the *shena*. The interior overseer of the *kap* appears to have been the only official who could operate in both the inner and outer parts of the palace. Without the information in Papyrus Bulaq 18, our knowledge of Middle Kingdom palace organization would barely extend further than the architectural plans of a 12th-Dynasty palace at Tell Basta and an early 13th Dynasty palace at Tell el-Dab'a in the Delta.

Urban Life: The Pyramid Town at Lahun

The lives of ordinary people are accessible to us via the town of Hetep-Senusret beside the pyramid complex of Senusret II at the site of Lahun. Mistakenly named 'Kahun' by Flinders Petrie, who excavated there in 1888–9, it was closely associated with the funerary cult of Senusret II. Laid out in a single architectural plan like the much smaller New Kingdom walled villages at Amarna and Deir el-Medina (see Chapters 9 and 10), Hetep-Senusret was founded to accommodate the king's workers and their families. It is likely, however, that it included among its inhabitants many who were not connected with the funerary cult. It has been estimated, on the basis of the capacities of grain silos throughout the town, that a population as high as 5,000 could have been supported. The modern site, however, is barely

distinguishable from the surrounding desert, since the mud brick has been almost entirely removed, leaving only the foundations and lower courses of the buildings.

The material from Lahun is particularly precious because it derives from the living world rather than the necropolis (although Middle Kingdom settlements have been excavated more recently at Abydos, Memphis, and Elephantine, allowing the Lahun material to begin to be viewed in a much broader geographical and social context). Unfortunately, much of the material left behind at Lahun, when it was first abandoned in the 13th Dynasty, was thrown into huge rubbish pits by the post-Middle Kingdom occupants of the site. Thus a great deal of the precious context of the material was destroyed long before the site was excavated. Nevertheless, some houses were left comparatively undisturbed, and these have the potential to provide glimpses into the lives of the kinds of individuals who tend not to feature in the surviving textual and funerary material. Thanks to Percy Newberry's collection of seed types during Petrie's expedition, it has even proved possible to recreate the vegetation of the area (despite a certain amount of contamination by Graeco-Roman botanical material). There were flowers such as poppies, lupins, mignonette, jasmine, heliotrope, and irises (as well as weeds), and vegetables, including peas, beans, radishes, and cucumbers.

The material from Lahun also includes such intriguing finds as a 'firestick' for lighting fires (probably the only surviving Egyptian example), the earliest known mud-brick mould (identical to those used by Egyptians today), a set of doctor's instruments, and many other tools used by farmers and professional craftworkers. There was also a rich variety of pottery, and a large number of papyri (some still unpublished), the contents of which shed light on many areas of religion and daily life. Among the most interesting of the texts from Lahun is the so-called Gynaecological Papyrus, which, as its name suggests, comprises the oldest surviving collection of remedies for women's ailments.

Foreign Trade

Commercial contacts between Middle Kingdom Egypt and the Aegean are indicated by a few sherds of Minoan pottery in the 12th-Dynasty phase of the Lahun settlement, as well as a pyxis lid and fragments of local Egyptian pottery that were clearly imitating Minoan types. Because these sherds were found in refuse deposits, however, it is

difficult to be sure of their dates or their original stratigraphic contexts. Curiously, they appear to have been common vessels used by the workmen (rather than luxury imports), perhaps even indicating the presence of foreign workers from Crete among the town's population. In the 12th Dynasty, there are also a few deposits of sherds from Minoan 'Kamare vessels' at such sites as Lahun, el-Haraga, and Abydos, and in a 12th-Dynasty grave as far south as Elephantine. Numerous items from this time also reveal the presence of a Mediterranean network of artistic and iconographic exchange: Egyptian motifs can be found on items as far-flung as the dedicatory clay scarab beetles offered in the peak sanctuaries in parts of Crete. Egyptian stone vases also made their way to Crete, where their styles were imitated by Minoan craftsmen. Although such local imitations of Egyptian styles and iconography are often from undated contexts, they are nevertheless important in that they suggest frequent contact leading to exchange of *ideas* as well as materials and products.

At Lahun and Lisht, there is also early evidence for the distinctive Tell el-Yahudiya ware (see Chapter 8), comprising jugs that perhaps once contained Near Eastern oil. The Egyptian kings actively promoted imports of timber, oil, wine, silver, and perhaps ivory from Syria-Palestine. Both Cypriot and Minoan pottery are also attested from other occasional finds in Egypt. Egyptian goods, such as scarabs, statues, vases, jewellery, and even several sphinxes have been found in sites as far apart as Byblos, Ras Shamra, and Crete. Via Syria, further contacts were made with Cyprus and Babylon, but very little of this material comes from properly dated contexts.

Increasing contact with the Near East is suggested by the fact that Asiatic weights actually outnumber Egyptian ones at Lahun. In addition, one of the richest finds of the Middle Kingdom is a collection of Asiatic (or perhaps Minoan) gold and silver material discovered in four bronze caskets underneath the temple of Montu at Tod. Conversely, Pierre Montet discovered a hoard of 1,000 Egyptian items buried in a jar at the Syrian city of Byblos, including jewellery bearing a strong likeness to the 'treasure' from the tombs of 12th-Dynasty princesses in the Lahun necropolis. Neferhotep and other Egyptian rulers were acknowledged as overlords by the local rulers of Byblos, who not only copied Egyptian insignia and titles but also imitated Egyptian hieroglyphic inscriptions.

There were also strong contacts with the areas to the south of Egypt. Apart from their activities in Nubia, many of the Middle Kingdom rulers, particularly Mentuhotep III and Senusret I, maintained trading

links with the African region of Punt (probably located somewhere in the vicinity of modern Eritrea). The 12th-Dynasty port of Saʿwaw has been discovered at the eastern end of the Wadi Gawasis, on the Red Sea coast (a short distance to the north of modern Quseir), and several inscribed stelae, found both along the wadi and at the port itself, provide records of 12th-Dynasty journeys to Punt.

Religion and Funerary Practices

The most important developments in Middle Kingdom religion concerned the cult of Osiris, who had by then become the Great God of all necropolises. One of the reasons for the cult's growth was the patronage lavished on it by the Middle Kingdom rulers, especially at Abydos in the 12th Dynasty. This climaxed in the reign of Senusret III, whose 'cenotaph' at Abydos was the first royal monument to be erected there in the Middle Kingdom. A decree from the time of the 13th-Dynasty ruler Wegaf (usurped by Neferhotep I) forbids tombs to be built on the processional way at Abydos. Sobekhotep III also erected stelae for several members of his family there, and Neferhotep I went to Abydos to take part in the mysteries of Osiris in the second year of his reign, erecting a stele to commemorate this event. Given the potency of Osiris and Abydos in terms of legitimizing royal power, the 13th-Dynasty rulers' interest in Abydos may have been due to their mainly non-royal background, but the same cannot be said for the 12th-Dynasty rulers. The growing influence of Osiris must have derived to some extent from active promotion of the site of Abydos and the so-called mysteries of Osiris. Some details of this set of rites are mentioned on a 12th-Dynasty stele (now in the Berlin Museum) that was set up at Abydos by Ikhnofret, the organizer of the annual festival during the reign of Senusret III.

The growth of the Osirian cult was accompanied by a cultural phenomenon sometimes described as the 'democratization of the after-life': the extension of once-royal funerary privileges to ordinary people. Large numbers of stelae at Abydos in particular show that it was becoming increasingly common for private individuals to take part in the rites of Osiris, thus receiving blessings that had once been restricted to kings. As a result of this development, the funerary beliefs and rites of the entire population began to change. One of the earliest such changes was the practice of decorating non-royal coffins with the Coffin Texts, a combination of extracts from the royal Pyramid Texts with new funerary compositions, which emerged during the First

Intermediate Period (see Chapter 6). In the mid-12th Dynasty, however, the use of these texts suddenly ceased, primarily as a result of further funerary changes, such as the introduction of the mummiform coffin, which, because of its more irregular shape, was less suited to long inscriptions of religious text.

Another religious development of the Middle Kingdom was the idea that all people (not just the king) had a *ba*, or spiritual force. The most evocative evidence for this is the literary text, the *Dialogue between a Man Tired of Life and his 'Ba'*, which must be the world's earliest debate on the issue of suicide—a powerful philosophical treatise. There was also a noticeable emphasis on 'personal piety' (that is, direct personal access to deities rather than via the king or priests, a religious concept that further increased in popularity during the New Kingdom). Stelae from the Middle Kingdom stress the piety of their deceased owners, and out of this grew the concept of the 'negative confession' (ritual lists of misdemeanours that the deceased claimed not to have committed). Stelae themselves became popular memorials, especially those decorated with *wedjat*-eyes, the paramount symbol of protection, but other insignia (the *shen*-ring and the winged sun-disc, for instance)—like those found on royal stelae—also appeared during this period.

Royal mortuary complexes of the 11th and 12th Dynasties also underwent considerable changes in design as the kings sought for the most appropriate architectural form to reflect their religious beliefs. Engineers and architects reached great heights of mastery, and the masons exceeded the considerable skills of their Old Kingdom counterparts. These skills were put to use not only in the service of the royal complexes, but also in the creation of larger and more skilfully constructed temples. In this period we find the complex internal engineering of the royal pyramids and structural experimentation in architecture, such as the terraced ambulatories of Mentuhotep II at Deir el-Bahri, the pylons and triple shrine of Mentuhotep III on the 'hill of Thoth' at Thebes, and the galleries of Senusret II in his pyramid at Lahun. Relief carving, previously found only in Old Kingdom mortuary complexes, now decorated the walls of Middle Kingdom temples for the gods, as well as kings. It was also in this period that the vast temple complex at Karnak was inaugurated, and the once commanding temples of the Faiyum were built.

Experimentation is also to be found in the regional tombs of the nomarchs from the 11th Dynasty onwards: they indicate the world-view of these officials, with their interests in hunting, fishing, and wrestling matches, and their fascination with the exotic world of the Asiatics.

The large, lavishly decorated rock-cut tombs usually featured pillared façades, and the tombs themselves were elevated above the burials of the members of their 'courts', scattered across the slopes below. The nomarchs' coffins—especially those from Deir el-Bersha—carry the finest artwork of all those that have survived. In a number of instances they are decorated with the earliest copies of the *Book of Two Ways*, which was a set of instructions for safely reaching the afterlife. As the nomarch's office diminished in importance, however, the character of the provincial necropolis changed: the size and number of the smaller tombs increased and there was less overt 'ranking' among the positions of graves. In the capital, on the other hand, things were rather different: the officials' tombs were located in the royal necropolises rather than their local family cemeteries, the *mastaba*-tombs became the preferred style of private tomb, and the provision of a memorial at Abydos became imperative for all.

By the Middle Kingdom, mummification had become much more widespread, but it was not effective. Although evisceration was more common, bodies were badly mummified and the residual flesh has seldom survived, despite the fact that their exterior wrappings were often lavish. The mummies were given cartonnage masks, which were often beautifully painted, and the bodies were placed on their sides in rectangular coffins oriented with regard both to the main compass points and to the texts written on their tomb walls.

A further significant change in funerary practices was the introduction of the *shabti*, a word that is sometimes also spelled *ushabti* or *shawabti*, and that may mean 'stick', 'answerer', or perhaps both. *Shabtis* were statuettes made from a variety of materials (wax, clay, pottery, faience, wood, or stone) which were meant to act as magical substitutes when work had to be done by the tomb-owner for Osiris. The earliest examples, dating to the time of Mentuhotep II, often took the form of small naked figures with no funerary formulas written on them, while others were mummiform in shape. These figurines were evidently three-dimensional reminders of Coffin Text spell 472, which appeared inside a few Middle Kingdom coffins. By the late 12th Dynasty, however, the text had begun to be written on the *shabti* itself. It is thought that the role of the *shabti* might be linked either with the corvée system by which each individual was obliged to work for the king, or with the work that ordinary people had to carry out in the maintenance of their local waterways. Like human workers, the later *shabtis* carried hoes and seed bags with which to undertake their tasks.

The Cultural Achievements of the Middle Kingdom

The Middle Kingdom was a time when art, architecture, and religion reached new heights but, above all, it was an age of confidence in writing, no doubt encouraged by the growth of the 'middle class' and the scribal sector of society, which was in turn due in no small measure to the expansion of the bureaucracy under Senusret III. Many different literary forms flourished, and the ancient Egyptians themselves appear to have regarded it as the 'classical' era of literature. Such narratives as the *Story of Sinuhe* (the popularity of which is indicated by the many copies that have survived), *The Shipwrecked Sailor*, and the fantastical episodes in Papyrus Westcar were all composed in the Middle Kingdom, while religious and philosophical works (such as the *Hymn to Hapy*, the *Satire of the Trades*, and the *Dialogue between a Man Tired of Life and his 'Ba'*) were also very popular. Furthermore, a wide variety of official documents have survived, including reports, letters and accounts, which not only help to round out the overall picture of the period but also indicate that literacy was more widespread than it had been during the Old Kingdom.

Under the direction of the Middle Kingdom rulers, Egypt had its eyes opened to the wider world of Nubia, Asia, and the Aegean, benefiting from the exchange of materials, products, and ideas. The Middle Kingdom was an age of tremendous invention, great vision, and colossal projects, yet there was also careful and elegant attention to detail in the creation of the smallest items of everyday use and decoration. This more human scale is present in the pervading sense that individual human beings had become more significant in cosmic terms, whether in terms of their obligations to the state (through taxation and the *corvée* work), their provisions for burial, or their increased presence within the literature of the times. Neither *Sinuhe* nor the 'shipwrecked sailor' could ever have been central characters in any Old Kingdom tale, but these individuals sit comfortably in the literature of the Middle Kingdom, which was an age of greater humanity.