

## **Recent research in Egypt / by W.M. Flinders Petrie.**

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# RECENT RESEARCH IN EGYPT.

BY

W M. FLINDERS-PETRIE.

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WASHINGTON:  
GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE.  
1898.

# THE HISTORY OF THE

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## RECENT RESEARCH IN EGYPT.<sup>1</sup>

By W. M. FLINDERS PETRIE, D. C. L., LL. D., Ph. D.

Discoveries come so incessantly and the point of view so often changes in the ever widening interests of Egyptian history that each year puts out of date a great part of what has been written. Any general work on Egyptian history or art needs revision every few months, so thickly have new subjects and new standpoints come before us lately. We propose here to show what great changes have arisen in our ideas during the last three years, taking each age in historical order.

During all this century in which Egyptian history has been studied at first hand, it has been accepted as a sort of axiom that the beginnings of things were quite unknown. In the epitome of the history which was drawn up under the Greeks to make Egypt intelligible to the rest of the world, there were three dynasties of kings stated before the time of the great pyramid builders; and yet of those it has been commonly said that no trace remained. Hence it has been usual to pass them by with just a mention as being half fabulous, and then to begin real history with Seneferu or Khufu (Cheops), the kings who stand at the beginning of the fourth dynasty, at about 4000 B. C.

The first discovery to break up this habit of thought was when the prehistoric colossal statues of Min, the god of the city of Koptos, were found in my excavations in his temple. These had carvings in relief upon them wholly different from anything known as yet in Egypt, and the circumstances pointed to their being earlier than any carvings yet found in that country. In the same temple we found also statues of sacred animals and pottery which we now know to belong to the very beginning of Egyptian history, many centuries before the pyramids, and probably about 5000 B. C. or earlier.

The next step was the finding of a new cemetery and a town of the prehistoric people, which we can now date to about 5000 B. C., within two or three centuries either way. This place lay on the opposite side of the Nile to Koptos—that is to say, about 20 miles north of Thebes. At first we were completely staggered by a class of objects entirely

<sup>1</sup> Reprinted from the Sunday School Times, February 19, 1898, by permission of the publishers.



different from any yet known in Egypt. We tried to fit them into every gap in Egyptian history, but found that it was impossible to put them before 3000 B. C. Later discoveries prove that they are really as old as 5000 B. C. They show a very different civilization from that of the Egyptians, whom we already know—far less artistic, but in some respects even more skillful in mechanical taste and touch than the historical Egyptians. They built brick houses to live in, and buried their dead in small chambers sunk in the gravels of the water courses, lined with mats, and roofed over with beams. They show several points of contact with the early Mediterranean civilization, and appear to have been mainly north African tribes of European type. Their pottery, in its patterns and painting, shows designs which have survived almost unchanged unto the present day among the Kabyles of the Algerian Mountains. And one very peculiar type of pottery is found spread from Spain to Egypt, and indicates a widespread commercial intercourse at that remote day. The frequent figures upon the vases of great galley ships rowed with oars, show that shipping was well developed then, and make the evidences of trading between different countries easy to be accepted.

All of the above belongs to the age probably before 4700 B. C., which is the age given for the first historical king of Egypt by the Greek history of Manetho. A keystone of our knowledge of the civilization is the identification of the tomb of Mena, the first name in Egyptian history, the venerated founder of all the long series of hundreds of historic kings. This tomb, about 15 miles north of Thebes, was found by some Arabs, and shown to M. De Morgan, the director of the Department of Antiquities. It was a mass of about thirty chambers, built of mud brick and of earth. Each chamber contained a different class of objects, one of stone vases, one of stone dishes, one of copper tools, one of water jars, etc. And among the things are carvings of lions and vases in rock crystal and obsidian, large hard-stone vases, slate palettes for grinding paint, pottery vases, and, above all, an ivory tablet with relief carvings which show the names of the king.

Besides this, M. Amelineau has found sixteen tombs of this same general character at Abydos, which we can hardly now doubt belong to the early kings of the first three dynasties, and some four or five have been actually identified with the names of these kings in the Greek history.

So now instead of treating the first three dynasties as half fabulous and saying that Egyptian art and civilization begin full blown at 4000 B. C., we have the clear and tangible remains of much of these early kings back to 4700 B. C., and a stretch of some centuries of the pre-historic period with a varied and distinctive civilization, well known and quite different from anything later, lying before 4700 B. C. To put the earlier part of this to 5500 B. C. is certainly no stretch of probability.

Coming down now into the historical period, a cemetery at Deshasheh (about 80 miles south of Cairo) was thoroughly worked out last year,



and we preserved all the skeletons and measured them. This belonged to the middle of the age of the pyramid builders, about 3500 B. C. To my great surprise, I found that two entirely different systems of treating the bodies were followed then. While many bodies were wrapped up and buried in the usual Egyptian style, nearly half of the bodies were more or less cut to pieces, and some had been elaborately dissected, stripped of all their flesh, and then wrapped up bone by bone separately in cloth. Thus there were two entirely different customs of funerals existing side by side. Yet, on measuring the bodies, there proved to be no distinct difference between them. The population was completely fused and unified as to ancestry, but had kept up entirely different customs in different levels of society.

We now pass entirely from these early times, with their fascinating insight into the beginnings of things, long before any other human history that we possess, until we reach down to what seems quite modern times in the record of Egypt, where it comes into contact with the Old Testament history. On clearing out the funeral temple of King Merenptah I found in that the upper half of a fine colossal statue of his, with all the colors still fresh upon it. As this son of Rameses the Great is generally believed to be the Pharaoh of the exodus, such a fine portrait of him is full of interest. Better even than that—I found an immense tablet of black granite over 10 feet high and 5 feet wide. It had been erected over two centuries before and brilliantly carved by an earlier king, whose temple was destroyed for materials by Merenptah. He took this splendid block and turned its face inward against the wall of his temple and carved the back of it with other scenes and long inscriptions. Most of it is occupied with the history of his vanquishing the Libyans, or North African tribes, who were then invading Egypt. But at the end he recounts his conquests in Syria, among which occurs the priceless passage: "The people of Israel are spoiled; they have no seed." This is the only trace yet found in Egypt of the existence of the Israelites, the only mention of the name, and it is several centuries earlier than the references to the Israelite and Jewish kings in the cuneiform inscriptions of Assyria. What relation this has to our biblical knowledge of the Israelites is a wide question, that has several possible answers. Without entering on all the openings, I may here state what seems to me to be the most probable connection of all the events, though I am quite aware that fresh discoveries might easily alter our views. It seems that either all the Israelites did not go into Egypt or else a part returned and lived in the north of Palestine before the exodus that we know, because we here find Merenptah defeating Israelites at about 1200 B. C. Of his conquest and of those of Rameses III in Palestine there are no traces in the biblical accounts, the absence of which indicates that the entry into Canaan took place after 1160 B. C., the last war of Rameses III. Then the period of the judges is given in a triple record—(1) of the north, (2) of the east of Jordan, (3) of Ephraim and the west; and these three accounts are quite distinct



and never overlap, though the history passes in succession from one to another. Thus the whole age of Judges is but little over a century. And to this agree the priestly genealogies stretching between the tabernacle and temple periods.

Leaving now all the monumental age, we come lastly to the evidences of the Christian period, preserved in the papyri or miscellaneous waste papers left behind in the towns of the Roman times. Last winter my friends, Mr. Grenfell and Mr. Hunt, cleared out the remains of the town Behnesa, about 110 miles south of Cairo. There, amid thousands of stray papers, documents, rolls, accounts, and all the waste sweepings out of the city offices, they found two leaves which are priceless in Christian literature—the leaf of Logia, or sayings of Jesus, and the leaf of Matthew's Gospel.

The leaf of the Logia is already so widely known that it is needless for me to describe it. But I would rather call attention to some obvious conclusions to which it awakes us and which render more clear our grasp of the history of the Gospels. Every great teacher surrounded by disciples has, in the natural order of things, been commemorated first by notebooks of his sayings, compiled by his nearest followers. The "Memorabilia" of Socrates, the "Teaching" of Epictetus, the "Table Talk" of Luther, are the most obvious examples of this. And to suppose that the record of the sayings of Jesus would be less attended to, less affectionately noted down, less treasured and preserved, is against all probability. It is *a priori* almost certain that collections of sayings must have been made. Where, then, have they gone? A leaf of such a collection has now turned up, showing that such did exist. But we can see, when our eyes are thus opened, that a whole handbook of classified sayings has come down to us in the form of what we call the Sermon on the Mount, the fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters of Matthew's Gospel. That is really the kernel of the whole Gospel. To that has been added a narrative for the sake of those who in later years were not familiar by hearsay with all that went on, and an introduction has been put before it to explain the circumstances. But the Sermon on the Mount has all the character of a contemporary handbook in its structure and nature, and the tone of it is entirely different from all the narratives written years after the events.

Another point to which this mass of papyri opens our eyes is the importance of the scribe and account keeper. In the East, down to the present time, the village scribe does all the business and is incessantly writing for people from morning to night. It is his profession. So it was in Roman times, and far the greater part of the writings that remain were written by the scribe and tax gatherer. When such a man left his profession his habits of life could not all change; he would naturally continue to write. And amid the group of fishermen and peasants gathered about Jesus it is impossible to doubt that Matthew, the tax gatherer, ready of pen all his life, would continue his old habit and be the natural scribe of the new way. John, the only other personal



disciple among the gospel writers, certainly wrote far later, when all his ways had changed from the days of his fisher life on the Sea of Galilee. Hence there appears no rival to the obvious position of Matthew as the first recorder of the sayings of his Master compiled in the Sermon on the Mount.

The leaf of Matthew's Gospel is of great interest in the literary history of the Gospels. Hitherto we have had no manuscripts older than the second great ecclesiastical settlement under Theodosius. Now we have a piece two ages earlier—before the first settlement of things under Constantine at the council of Nicæa. Here, in the middle of the third century, we find that the beginning of the Gospel, the most artificial, and probably the latest, part, the introductory genealogy and account of the Nativity was exactly in its present form. This gives us the greatest confidence that the Gospel as we have it dates from the time of the great persecutions.

Such are some of the astonishing and far-reaching results that Egypt has given us within three years past. All the most important ages of history seem to suddenly stand out with a vividness and clearness which has hardly any parallel in the history of discovery. What may not three years more show us?

DENDERA, KENA, CAIRO, EGYPT.



the first of the year, the weather was very cold, and the  
ground was covered with snow. The wind was very  
strong, and the rain was very heavy. The people  
were very busy, and the work was very hard.

The second of the year, the weather was very cold, and  
the ground was covered with snow. The wind was very  
strong, and the rain was very heavy. The people  
were very busy, and the work was very hard.

The third of the year, the weather was very cold, and  
the ground was covered with snow. The wind was very  
strong, and the rain was very heavy. The people  
were very busy, and the work was very hard.

The fourth of the year, the weather was very cold, and  
the ground was covered with snow. The wind was very  
strong, and the rain was very heavy. The people  
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The fifth of the year, the weather was very cold, and  
the ground was covered with snow. The wind was very  
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The sixth of the year, the weather was very cold, and  
the ground was covered with snow. The wind was very  
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The seventh of the year, the weather was very cold, and  
the ground was covered with snow. The wind was very  
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The eighth of the year, the weather was very cold, and  
the ground was covered with snow. The wind was very  
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The ninth of the year, the weather was very cold, and  
the ground was covered with snow. The wind was very  
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The tenth of the year, the weather was very cold, and  
the ground was covered with snow. The wind was very  
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The eleventh of the year, the weather was very cold, and  
the ground was covered with snow. The wind was very  
strong, and the rain was very heavy. The people  
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The twelfth of the year, the weather was very cold, and  
the ground was covered with snow. The wind was very  
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