Egypt, Syria and Palestine I

Egypt's armies secured her commercial interests by re-establishing her traditional influence at Byblos, and by gaining control of the inland trade routes to Palestine, Syria and Mittani.

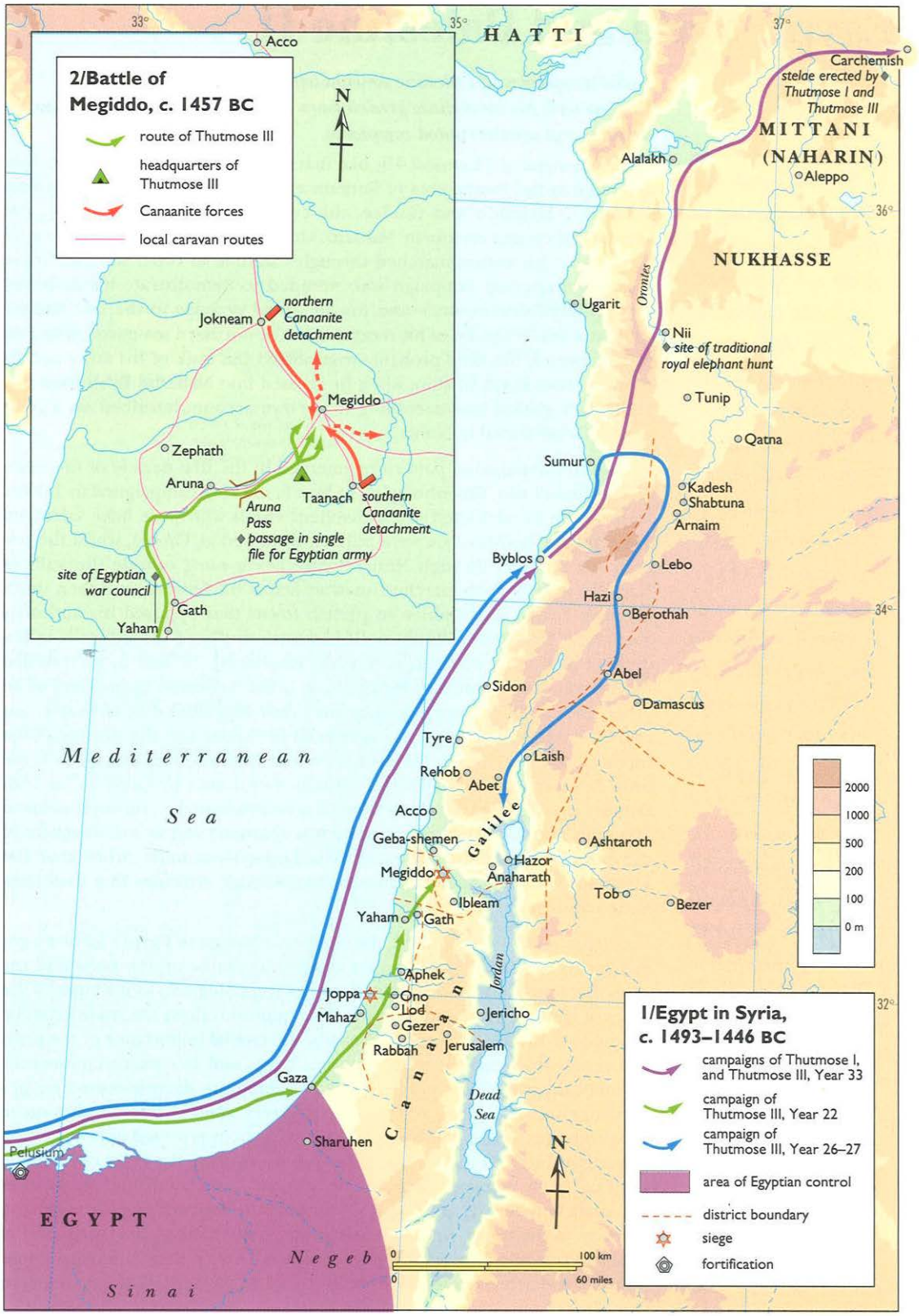
"I will perform a miracle for you: I grant you valour and victory over all the hills. I place your power and your fearfulness in all the plains, and the dread of you up to the very pillars of the sky."
The Poetical Stela of Thutmose III

There is no compelling evidence to suggest that Ahmose exploited his success at Sharuhen by continuing his campaigns further into Palestine; his son and successor, Amenhotep I, appears not to have campaigned in Palestine at all. Although archaeological evidence for the burning and abandonment of sites such as Jericho has, in the past, been ascribed to the activities of Egyptian armies, these destructions were in all probability the result of protracted, localized troubles between Canaanite chiefs. Written records suggest that New Kingdom Egyptian armies rarely destroyed lands or fortresses; instead success is recorded in terms of the quantity of plunder captured for the temples as tribute or in terms of the number of prisoners awarded to courageous soldiers. This behaviour seems consistent with that of an urban society which understood the importance of the Palestinian city-states for the movement of trade.

Within thirty years of Sharuhen, however, Thutmose I had led Egyptian armies as far as Naharin (which the Egyptians used as a synonym for Mittani), and erected a stela on the banks of the Euphrates proclaiming the northern boundary of his domain. A list of place names apparently related to this campaign, inscribed on a monumental gate at Karnak, covers the area from Byblos along the coast toward Sumur, and across the mountains of Lebanon to the Orontes. The mention of Byblos is crucial: this major seaport had been the traditional point of contact between Egypt and the Levant. It is possible that Thutmose I avoided Palestine altogether and moved his armies to Byblos by sea, focussing his campaign (which may have been little more than a display of strength) inland on a region crossed by some of the major trade routes of the ancient Near East, linking the Levantine ports to Palestine, Anatolia, the lands of the king of Mittani, and beyond to Assyria.

His grandson, Thutmose III, adopted a systematic approach to affirming Egypt's influence in Palestine and Syria by undertaking 17 campaigns virtually on an annual basis during his Years 22 to 42. On the first he marched via Gaza and a siege of Joppa to the key city of Megiddo, which controlled the major trade routes through the north of Palestine. Catching his enemies completely by surprise after an audacious advance through the narrow Aruna Pass, he defeated an alliance of city-states and their armies in battle, and eventually took the city after a seven month siege. On his 5th and 6th campaigns, he marched along the northern part of the coastal plain near Byblos and attacked the lands of the chief of Kadesh (another city strategically located on trade routes) as far as Galilee. Then, in his 33rd Year, he made his own way to Naharin and erected a stela alongside that of his grandfather (unfortunately these stelae have not survived and are known only from ancient references). Subsequently, during his 9th, 10th, 13th and 17th campaigns, there was further military activity against Canaanite cities. However, only during his first campaign did the king claim to have captured cities and humiliated or replaced their leaders, and in only one other Year (39) did he campaign in southern Palestine, on that occasion with the deliberate intention of punishing a major local disturbance. On at least four "campaigns" the king apparently avoided any fighting and restricted himself to formal displays of authority.

An aerial view of the modern tell at Megiddo looking towards the Egyptian advance. The direct approach from the southwest, via the Aruna Pass, was so narrow and difficult that it was left undefended by the coalition facing Thutmose III, but the king himself led his forces, including chariots and horses, in single file and pounced on the enemy camp unawares.


2/Battle of Megiddo, c. 1457 BC
route of Thutmose III
headquarters of Thutmose III
Canaanite forces
local caravan routes
N
Acco
Jokneam
northern Canaanite detachment
Megiddo
Zephath
Aruna
Taanach
southern Canaanite detachment
Aruna Pass
passage in single file for Egyptian army
site of Egyptian war council
Gath
Yaham
HATTI
Carchemish
stelae erected by Thutmose I and Thutmose III
MITTANI (NAHARIN)
Alalakh
Aleppo
NUKHASSE
Orontes
Ugarit
Nii
site of traditional royal elephant hunt
Tunip
Qatna
Sumur
Kadesh
Shabtuna
Arnaim
Byblos
Lebo
Hazi
Berothah
Abel
Sidon
Damascus
Tyre
Laish
Rehob
Abet
Galilee
Acco
Geba-shemen
Ashtaroth
Hazor
Anaharath
Megiddo
Tob
Bezer
Ibleam
Yaham
Gath
Aphek
Joppa
Ono
Lod
Mahaz
Gezer
Jericho
Rabbah
Jerusalem
Jordan
Canaan
Dead Sea
Gaza
Sharuhen
Pelusium
EGYPT
Negeb
Sinai
Mediterranean Sea
2000
1000
500
200
100
0 m
1/Egypt in Syria, c. 1493–1446 BC
campaigns of Thutmose I, and Thutmose III, Year 33
campaign of Thutmose III, Year 22
campaign of Thutmose III, Year 26–27
area of Egyptian control
district boundary
siege
fortification
0
100 km
0
60 miles
33°
35°
37°
36°
34°
32°

Egypt, Syria and Palestine II

In his campaigns in Palestine Amenhotep II displayed a continuity of purpose with his immediate predecessors. His primary goal was regional stability and uninterrupted commerce.

"At daybreak, the king approached at the reins, equipped with a sceptre and the regalia of Montju ... Anukharta was plundered ... The king reached the area of Megiddo. The chief of Qebaasumin, whose name was Qaqa, was caught—his wife, his children and his household likewise—and another chief was put in his place. The king reached Memphis with his will satisfied in all the hills, and all the plains beneath his sandals."
Stela of Amenhotep II from the temple of Ptah at Memphis

The campaigns of Thutmose III, like that of his grandfather, had been concentrated in the coastal area of Retjenu and lands north of the hill-country (Canaan), Megiddo and Galilee, the coast around Byblos (Djahy), the Orontes valley, and eventually Naharin. Only on his first campaign can we be certain that his armies marched through Palestine in order to reach these areas; perhaps that campaign was intended to demonstrate his authority throughout Palestine once and for all, allied perhaps to the fact that he could not yet be certain of his reception in the northern sea-ports. After that time, however, the king probably transported the bulk of his army and its supplies from Egypt by ship; when he crossed into Naharin, Byblos was certainly his logistical base according to his own account inscribed on a great stela at Gebel Barkal in Nubia.

The same campaigning pattern re-emerged in the first decade of the reign of Thutmose's son, Amenhotep II. In Year 3, the king campaigned in Takhsy, from where he abducted seven dissident chiefs who were later sacrificed in Egypt (the bodies of six were publicly displayed at Thebes, whilst the seventh was paraded through Nubia before being hung outside the walls of Napata). In Year 7, he marched an army across the Orontes and then south through Takhsy and Galilee to punish towns that opposed his authority (including Nii, where Thutmose III had once displayed his authority in traditional pharaonic manner by hunting elephants). In Year 9, he travelled from Perunefer, the port of Memphis, in order to depose Qaqa, chief of an otherwise unknown town (Qebaasumin) near Megiddo: this, of course, was crucial territory for Egypt's commercial interests, and the gravity of the threat posed by rebels in the area is evident from the fact that Qaqa is the only Palestinian or Syrian chief actually mentioned by name in an 18th Dynasty royal inscription. According to accounts inscribed on royal stelae at Memphis and Karnak, this campaign was characterized by the slaughter of the population of Iturin (location unknown)—notable proof that the Egyptians were not afraid openly to acknowledge atrocities that they committed against foreign cities.

Throughout this whole period, the consistent feature of Egypt's involvement in Canaan and the Levant was her interest in the Levantine ports and the cities that bordered the inland trade-routes from Megiddo to the lands of the kings of Hatti, Mittani and Babylon. This interest reflects the traditional significance of Byblos and, more especially, the crucial importance of the ports and roads which moved trade between Egypt and her major commercial partners, the great kings of the Near East. Thutmose III had secured Egypt's influence in the region, and thereafter direct military intervention arose only from the need to punish rebellion (as Egypt interpreted any opposition to her interest) and restore the status quo. In general, the cities of Palestine were far from being enslaved or conquered, but they found themselves squeezed between Egypt to the south and her dependencies and trading partners to the north, and so it fell to the local rulers to play their part as loyal servants of a king whose long shadow fell across their land, and whose caravans and armies demanded the freedom to move in whatever direction they pleased.


Anatolia
HATTI
ARZAWA
MITTANI (NAHARIN)
Carchemish
Alalakh
Aleppo
NUKHASSE
Orontes
Ugarit
Nii
site of traditional royal elephant hunt
Enkomi
ALASHIYA
CYPRUS
Hala Sultan Tekke
finds of contemporary Egyptian imports
Qatna
Sumur
Kadesh
Shabtuna
Arnaim
Byblos
Lebo
Hazi
Berothah
Djahy
Takhsy
Abel
Hadara
Damascus
Sidon
Mediterranean Sea
Tyre
Laish
Rehob
Abet
Acco
Raphon
Ashtaroth
Kenath
Geba-shemen
Galilee
Hazor
Anaharath
Megiddo
defeat of Qadesh, c. 1418
Bezer
Imshan
Yaham
Ibleam
Gath
RETJENU
Jordan
Aphek
Joppa
Ono
Mahaz
Jericho
Gezer
Jerusalem
Rabbah
sea route from Memphis
Gaza
Dead Sea
Yurza
Sharuhen
Pelusium
EGYPT
Negeb
Sinai
2000
1000
500
200
100
0 m
32°
34°
36°
N
0
100 km
0
60 miles
Egypt in Syria, c. 1425–1418
Amenhotep II in Year 7
Amenhotep II in Year 9
zone of Egyptian influence
zone of Egyptian dominance

Urbanization

The New Kingdom saw dramatic changes in the urban development of Egypt as the largest settlements grew into huge, cosmopolitan cities.

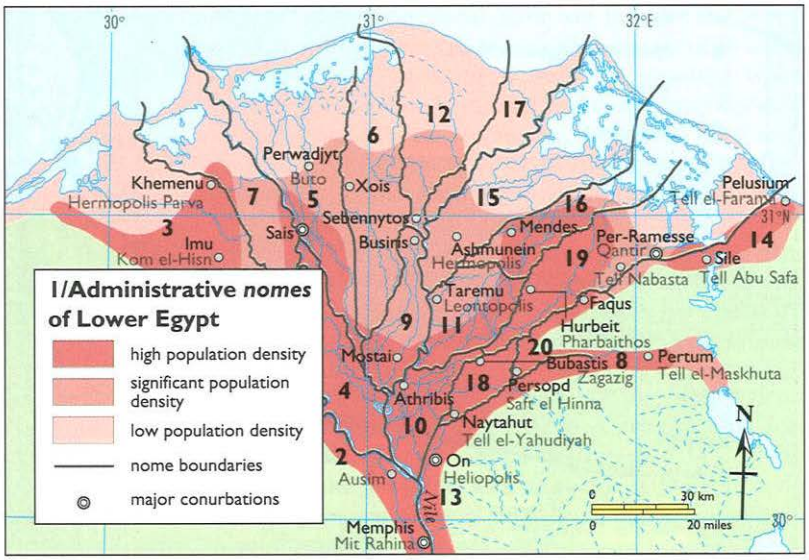
"This flight your servant made was not premeditated; it was not my wish, I did not invent it. I do not know what took me from my home. It was like sleepwalking; like when a marsh-man finds himself in Elephantine—a man of the delta in the far south."
The Story of Sinuhe

Since the Old Kingdom, the Egyptians had distinguished three types of communities: villages, communities with a harbour—which became centres of trade and travel—and larger towns. The largest towns were the capitals of the administrative districts (*nomes*), which by the time of New Kingdom numbered 42. Each capital was densely populated and surrounded by other communities; sometimes there was another populous centre. Between these centres, however, the population could dwindle to almost nothing.

The population of Egypt as a whole increased dramatically during the New Kingdom: exact figures are hard to establish, but some estimates suggest that numbers increased from 1½ million to 2½–5 million during the 18th–19th Dynasties. Most of this increase occurred at Memphis and Heliopolis, where up to half of the entire population may have resided: Memphis may have been the world's first city with over 1 million people. Larger provincial centres such as Sais, Per-Ramesse, Herakleopolis and Thebes also expanded, swelled partly by large numbers of immigrants attracted by the wealth and stability of the country. These immigrants and their descendants formed tight-knit but generally well-respected communities which offered Egypt workers with crucial skills, such as seamen, merchants, mercenaries, translators and glassworkers. Texts from the New Kingdom manifest names from as far afield as Libya, Greece, Babylon and Kush.

These communities formed a cohesive society, its character dictated by local issues and the needs of the farmers who formed Egypt's economic base, but with a government which was still characteristically centralized. Social hierarchies ensured that the distribution of wealth was élitist, and the king made an elaborate show out of rewarding loyal officials at home and abroad. There was a permanent military administration but the army was never employed as a coercive arm of government; there were few garrisons in Egypt itself, and their role was to train and to register those liable for military service.

The Northern Palace of Akhetaten was part of a new city built for Amenhotep IV; possibly it housed his principal queen when the court was in residence. Even a great palace such as this was typically built with hard, but ultimately friable mud-brick, emphasizing the fleeting character of a living settlement in comparison with the permanence of stone-built tombs and temples, which tend to dominate the archaeological record of pharaonic Egypt.




30°
34°E
Mediterranean Sea
see map 1
el Balamun
Buto
Xois
Khemenu
Hermopolis Parva
Sais
Tanis
Pharbaithos
Tell Nabasta
Imu
Kom el-Hisn
Hurbeit
Taremu
Leontopolis
Faqus
Phakussa
Bubastis
Zagazig
Athribis
Tell el-Maskhuta
Letopolis
Auslim
On
Heliopolis
30°N
Memphis
Mit Rahina
13
Western Desert
1
22
Itjtawy
el-Lisht
Maidum
Shedet
Medinet el-Faiyum
21
Atfih
Sinai
Ihnasya
20
Herakleopolis
Teudjai
el-Hiba
19
18
Permedjed
Oxyrhyncus
17
Hardai
Tihna
16
el-Minya
Balansura
Menat Khufu
Beni Hasan
15
Ashmunein
Hermopolis
Gulf of Suez
Arabian Desert
Qis
Cusae
14
Manfalut
13
Sauty
Asyut
12
11
Shutb
10
Qaw el-Kebeir
9
Akhmim
Thinis
8
Dendera
Abydos
7
6
Hiw
Coptos
24°
5
4
Iuny
Armant
Wast
Thebes
el-Moʿalla
Iunyt
Esna
3
N
0
200 km
0
100 miles
2/Administrative nomes of Upper Egypt
over 200 people per kilometre
100–200 people per kilometre
under 200 people per kilometre
nome boundaries
major conurbations
1500
1000
500
200
100
0 m

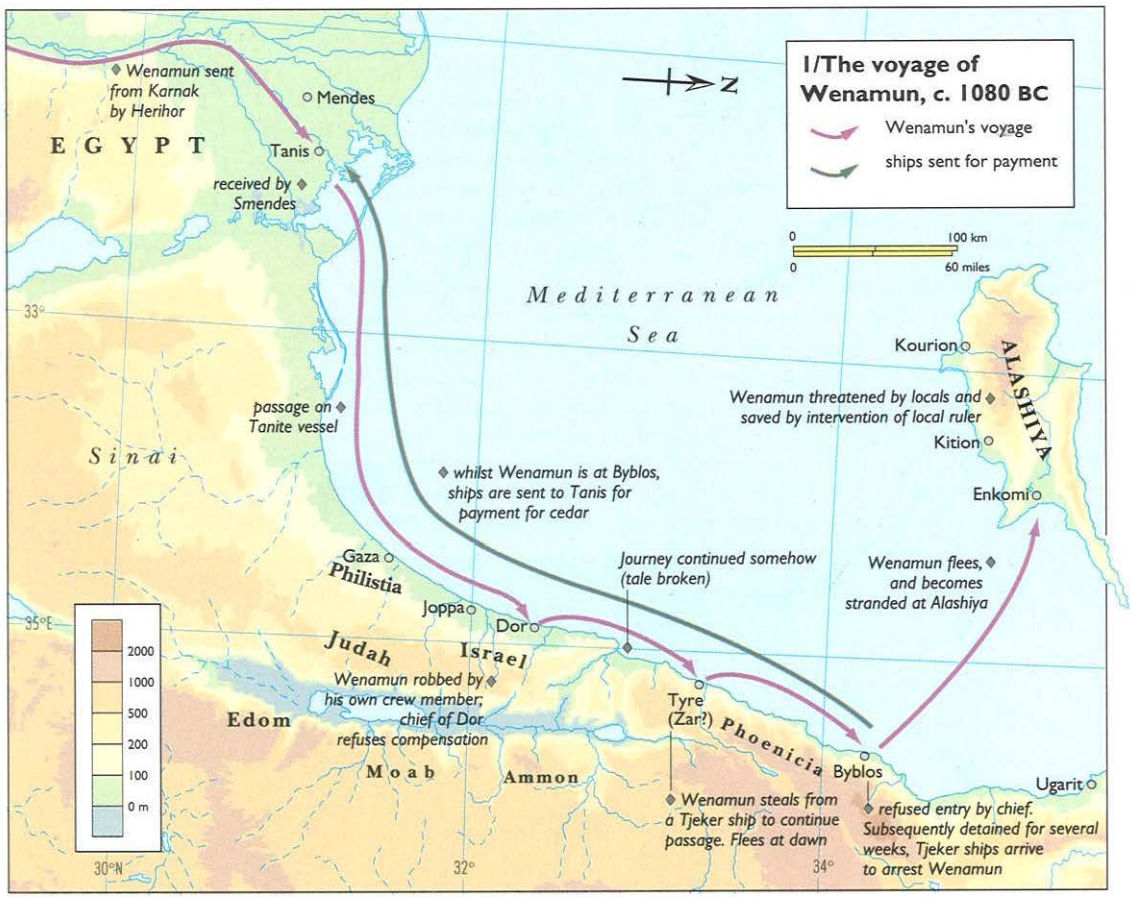
The Decline of Royal Authority

A radical reconsideration of the personal authority of the last Ramesside pharaohs resulted in the division of the kingship of Egypt.

"Since there is no boat on the river that does not belong to Amun, and the sea belongs to him, therefore the Lebanon, which you say is yours, that also belongs to him."
The Voyage of Wenamun

In comparison with the earlier New Kingdom, monuments of the 20th Dynasty seem unimpressive, but this is not necessarily symptomatic of a decline in royal wealth or authority: Ramesses III had been vigorous in defence of his country, and there is no evidence of a dramatic reduction in trade with the Near East. In Nubia a vigorous administration retained control, and since the infrastructure of government and gold mining was now centuries old, further development was perhaps unnecessary. Periodic restrictions in the food supply at Deir el-Medina may indicate no more than the normal pattern of life in ancient Thebes, and though there were robberies in the Valley of the Kings, there was no challenge to the authority of the royal officials who conducted the ensuing prosecutions. However, in the final decades of the New Kingdom, the ideology of kingship was changing fundamentally, and this would have profound implications.

The defining phenomena in this change were a reduction in the travelling of the king (although his representatives were still prominent throughout the country), and the emergence of a theocracy in Thebes. The result was to lessen the charismatic presence of the king, increase the power of the oracles



of the Theban gods, and blur the distinction between the authority of the high priest of Amun and that of the king himself. Around Year 12 of Ramesses XI, the armies of Panehsy, viceroy of Nubia, occupied Thebes, and confiscated temple lands on which to settle veterans; the high priest of Amun, Amenhotep, was deposed and chased to Hardai. The viceroy assumed control of the area but was an unpopular governor: seven years later, the commander of all Egypt's armies, Herihor (who may have been a son of Amenhotep by marriage) was recognized as the new high priest. His son, Piankh, pursued Panehsy's armies back to Nubia. Herihor then assumed the titles of vizîr, viceroy of Nubia, and, most significantly, a royal titulary, in which his fitness to rule was ascribed to his priestly authority. Although the rule of Ramesses XI remained unquestioned outside Thebes, a new era was generally acknowledged by dating legal documents to the time of the "Repeating (or Multiplying) of Births"; the significance of the phrase is unknown, but it may refer to the duplication of the earthly king, or indicate a period of renaissance. In this era also appear the earliest references to the shadowy figure of Smendes, *de facto* king at Tanis.

Dating to the seven years of the "Repeating of Births" is a remarkable text known as "The Voyage of Wenamun". There is disagreement amongst scholars about whether the story is an account of a real or fictional journey since it is so rich in characterization, has a vividness unexpected in a dry-as-dust document, and continues a theme—an Egyptian stranded abroad by circumstances beyond his control—familiar from literature. Nevertheless, the story has coloured most accounts of Egypt's declining authority in the Near East.

Wenamun is sent by Herihor to Byblos, on a ship sailing out of Tanis, in order to bring cedar for the sacred boat of Amun. *En route* he endures a series of humiliations. At Dor, he is robbed and left stranded, with only a portable statue of Amun for support. Having himself resorted to robbery in order to reach Byblos, once there Wenamun discovers that an Egyptian without documents or gifts cannot demand cedar, and is detained until payment is arranged and transported from Tanis. The governor's court takes advantage of this unexpected opportunity to humiliate the forlorn-looking official—having been dictated to by such people for centuries! Eventually, the wood is supplied, but Tjeker sailors, from whom Wenamun had stolen, demand his arrest. He flees and is stranded at Alashiya, where the locals threaten his life; at this point the story is abruptly broken off. Throughout, Wenamun demonstrates the determination and ingenuity which his countrymen would have admired.