

Yosef Ben-Jochannan: A Note and Photo Essay about His Life, Work and Influence

by

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I met Yosef ben-Jochannan for the first time in the 1980s.

Today, as I pen these words, it is his birthday and I thought that this essay would make a nice present for him. His full name is Yosef Alfredo Antonio ben-Jochannan. A lot of us called him Dr. Ben. I was very fortunate to know him over an extended period of time, more than thirty years in fact. He was born this day 31 December in 1918. I traveled with him on my first trip to Africa, specifically Egypt, in 1991. On that trip he let me do my first lecture in Africa. I went with him to Egypt three other times as his personal assistant. I have many memories of him, both the man and his work. Today I will spend much of the day writing a long photo essay about him, his work and his impact on my work. I could say that in March of this year when he transitioned that we lost an immortal. But that hardly does him justice. Dr. Ben has brought African history to life for the masses of African people. This is perhaps his greatest legacy and gift.

Dr. Ben, we salute you. And we say that you are not dead. You live in us. You were and are one of the greats!

In Egypt With Yosef A.A. Ben-Jochannan: Icon of African Historiography (Written in 1997)

"This is but a mere feeble effort in saying: Without you, African/Black mother, there would have been no us--African/Black fathers, sons and daughters. Do we need to say any more African/Black mothers, our own true goddesses! Let us praise you to the highest, telling the world about your righteousness. Let us tell the entire universe about your sacredness African/Black woman.

--Yosef A.A. ben-Jochannan

Every African should try to visit Egypt at least once during their lifetime. It is a pilgrimage to our sacred motherland--the cradle of civilization--and one is never the same afterwards. Although there are now numerous study tours to Egypt, undoubtedly the most celebrated are those of was hosted by Dr. Yosef A.A. ben-Jochannan. Dr. Ben's tours include the massive rock-hewn temples of King Ramses II and Queen Nefertari at Abu Simbel, the temple of goddess Isis at Philae Island, the royal tombs of the Valley of the Kings and the west bank mortuary temples of Makare Hatshepsut, Ramses II and Ramses III at Luxor, the east bank worship temples of Luxor and Karnak, the temple of goddess Hathor at Dendera, the Sphinx and the massive pyramids on the Giza Plateau, the Step pyramid designed by the multi-genius Imhotep at Sakkara, and the Egyptian Museum at Cairo.

Regarding these sites, the reader should know that Usemare Ramses II (popularly known as "Ramses the Great") ruled Egypt more than six decades and emerged as one of history's most colossal builders. Nefertari, his chief queen, helped Ramses govern and was revered throughout ancient Egypt. Isis was one of Egypt's greatest deities, and along with her husband Osiris and son Horus, formed one of antiquities' great triads. The Valley of the Kings entombed the bodies of some of pharaonic Egypt's most significant rulers. Makare Hatshepsut was a great female monarch who governed effectively for twenty years. Ramses III fought off two foreign invasions of Egypt and sat on the throne for thirty-one years. Karnak temple is the world's largest religious sanctuary. Hathor was the Egyptian goddess of love, beauty and sensuality. The enormous pyramids on the Giza plateau have been called "miracles in stone," while the Step Pyramid at Sakkara has the distinction of being the world's first large stone monument. The Cairo Museum is crammed full of the representations, physical remains, personal possessions and writings of the pharaohs, queens, officials and ordinary people the ancient Nile Valley.

Dr. Ben's tours, like the man himself, stand out quite singularly. Born December 31, 1918 in Gondar, Ethiopia, Dr. Yosef Alfredo Antonio ben-Jochannan ("Dr. Ben," as he is affectionately known) has devoted the better part of his life to the illumination of the indigenous origins of African civilizations.

By profession, he is a trained lawyer, engineer, historian and Egyptologist. Ben-Jochannan went to Egypt for the first time in 1939, and moved to Harlem, New York in 1945. Dr. Ben knew Malcolm X personally, and was a student and colleague of George G.M. James. He was exceptionally close to the late Dr. John Henrik Clarke. Since 1957, he has coordinated regular study tours and pilgrimages to the Nile Valley, directly exposing thousands of African people to the still visible splendors of ancient Egypt. Formerly adjunct professor at Cornell University's Africana Studies Department, Dr. ben-Jochannan has also been a professor-at-large at Al Azar University in Cairo.

While now advanced in years, Dr. Ben continues to wield tremendous influence on African studies. He is indeed one of the most unrelenting twentieth century advocates of the African origins of Nile Valley civilizations and the African origins of Western religions. By his own account, he has prepared seventy-five manuscripts for publication, and was working on another during his 1997 tour. He is the author of more than twenty books, including *African Origins of the Major Western Religions* in 1970, *Africa: Mother of Western Civilization* in 1971, *Black Man of the Nile and His Family* in 1972, *A Chronology of the Bible: A Challenge to the Standard Version* in 1973, *The African Called Rameses ("The Great") II*, and the *African Origin of Western Civilization* in 1990. Several of his works have gone through a number of reprints and different editions, and although controversial, all of them are well-documented. As pointed out by Dr. Leonard Jeffries:

"Ben-Jochannan's extensive publications contain voluminous reference materials and sources to stimulate students and scholars to pursue more systematic and scientific research. He also includes very revealing photos, illustrations and charts that help the ordinary layman grasp the significance of the work."

Dr. ben-Jochannan remains uncompromising in his views, a lively public speaker and a prolific writer, and has probably done more to popularize African history than any living scholar. Dr. Ben has brought history to life for the masses of African people. This is perhaps his greatest legacy and gift.

Instruction and Comments Black Man of the Nile: An Historical Overview of Dynastic Kmt

During the 1980s and 1990s I worked extensively with one of Dr. ben-Jochannan's colleagues—the great Ivan Van Sertima. He and Dr. Ben were two of the great pillars of African historiography at that time. Ivan edited several major volumes on Egypt and I ably assisted him. Perhaps my most significant contribution to these journals was an essay I wrote and dedicated to Dr. Ben himself. I wanted to honor him.

While in Egypt, in 1993, I gave him a draft of the essay. I thought that it was a nice touch and it made me feel good. I thought that it was a small payback for all for work that he had done on our knowledge of the Black man of the Nile. But for Dr. Ben, that was not enough. He actually gave me the essay back the following morning, complete with corrections, in red ink no less! I still have it and will always treasure it. The following is what he wrote on the first page of the essay. And following is an updated version of the essay, complete with brilliant, original photos. Dr. Ben always liked the idea of primary research. And I am confident that he would love the photos and the updates!

"I've read this masterpiece with the ferocity of an academic lion whose jaws refuse to release the meat of glorious learning and African pride. Well done my honored brother."

Yosef Ben-Jochannan
July 6, 1993

From the beginning of the First Kamite Dynasty and through the greater part of her Dynastic Period, African people with dark complexions, full lips, broad noses, and tightly-curved hair were fully and overwhelmingly dominant in both the general population and the royal families. ¹ By the latter portion of the fourth millennium B.C.E., the forces of the Black Land of Upper Kmt, probably during the reign of Narmer (the historical king often equated with the legendary Menes), had completed the task of coupling Upper Kmt in the South (the borders of which extended from the vicinity of the first cataract at the apex of the Delta), with Lower Kmt in the North (essentially the Delta) into a single unified state. ² Although the history of the struggle for the unification of the Two Lands is lacking in many details, it is highly significant that Narmer, the first Lord of the Two Lands of Kmt, came from the South. On this point, it has been written that: "The Southern Kingdom, Upper Egypt, was clearly conceived as the dominant of the two regions. It was from the south that the most enduring influences in Egyptian society came and without doubt most of its greatest leaders were southerners too. Throughout her long history Egypt constantly needed to return to the south to refresh herself and to restore her institutions, even perhaps her soul, when the weight of years or of external pressures laid too heavily upon her." ³

According to the preeminent British Egyptologist of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, William Mathew Flinders Petrie (1853-1942): "It is remarkable how renewed vitality has always come into Egypt from the south.... Each of the great stages of Egyptian history seems to owe its new energy to a southern conquest."⁴

And as Dr. Cheikh Anta Diop (1923-1986) explained, "We also understand better now why the Egyptian term designating royalty etymologically means: (the man) 'who comes from the South' = who belongs to the South = who is a native of the South = the king of Egypt, not only the king of Upper Egypt."⁵ Indeed, the establishment of the very early kingdom of Ta-Seti, based at Qustul in Lower Nubia, preceded the unification of Kmt and may have been the seat of Kmt's founding dynasty.⁶ It should also be pointed out, that while Narmer is generally regarded by modern historians as Kmt's first true monarch, he likely saw himself as the culmination of an historical epoch rather than the beginning. Narmer was the heir to thousands of years of African achievement, and assumed charge of an already advanced and well-evolved society.

Ushered in by the conquests of King Narmer, Dynasties I and II (ca. 3200?-2686 B.C.E.), usually designated the *Early Dynastic* or *Archaic Period*, reflect the practical consolidation of Kmt as a nation-state. It was during the Early Dynastic Period that the White Wall--referred to by the Kamites as *Ineb-hedj* and designated in Graeco-Roman tradition as *Memphis*--at the frontier between Upper and Lower Kmt, was established as Kmt's administrative capital. The White Wall would remain one of Kmt's foremost centers through the length of the Dynastic Period.

Following Narmer, other important royal personages of the Early Dynastic Period included: Hor-Aha, or Aha-Mena, perhaps Narmer's son, under whom major temples were erected and dedicated to Ptah and Neit; Djer, who occupied the throne of Kmt for forty-seven years and celebrated far into Kamitic history as a superb physician; Merneit, who may have been Dynastic Kmt's first female monarch; Den, who conducted experiments with stone as a building material; and the last king of Dynasty II--Khasekhemui, another Southerner who strove aggressively to irrevocably cement the foundations of a strongly centralized Kamite state.

Of Khasekhemui, Michael Rice notes that:

"It is probable that he, at least as much as Menes-Narmer, deserves the name of the Unifier of Egypt. If he was a giant in stature he remained a giant in the recollection of the people, for his memory was venerated profoundly over many centuries. The two statues from Hierakonpolis, the first from Egypt to show the King enthroned, are amongst the greatest works of art to survive from this early period."⁷

After the reign of Khasekhemui, Kmt's Early Dynastic Period gave way to the historical era known as the Old Kingdom (2686-2181 B.C.E.). The Old Kingdom, comprising Dynasties III through VI, is viewed as Kmt's First Golden Age. The Old Kingdom is chiefly appreciated as the famous epoch of Kamite pyramid building.

These monuments, particularly the three built over a seventy year period that dominate the Giza plateau, are arguably the world's most enduring expressions of architectural prowess, and remain a source of awe, wonder and inspiration. ⁸ The pyramid of Khufu itself--the purest geometric form in human architecture--has the distinction of being the largest single building ever constructed by man. ⁹

From the Old Kingdom emerged such luminaries as: Netjerykhet Zoser, the first recognized royal personage to commission the construction of a large monument in hewn stone; Bedjmes, the noted African ship-builder; the phenomenal Imhotep, architect, administrator, astronomer, author, magician, physician, and high-priest; Nae-maet Sneferu, the benevolent king during whose reign the classic pyramid form appeared; Khufu, builder of the Great Pyramid ('Khufu on the Horizon'); Khafre, who built the Second Giza Pyramid ('Great is Khafre') and may have had the face of Hor-m-akhet (the 'Great Sphinx') rendered in his own likeness; Menkaure, builder of the third Giza Pyramid ('Divine is Menkaure'); Hesyre, 'Chief of Dentists and Physicians'; Sahure, who launched the first recorded Kametic expedition to Punt ('God's Land') in Inner Africa; Ptah-hotep, author of profound precepts of morality and ethics; Unas, whose tomb chamber was the first to be inscribed with the religious literature now known as the Pyramid Texts, and Pepi II, another Southerner, whose ninety-four years on the throne is the longest documented reign in human annals.

By 2180 B.C.E., increasingly arid climatic conditions and accelerating political decentralization had resulted in a drastic decline in Kametic fortunes. Incursions of Asiatics into the Delta and social revolution hastened the decline.¹⁰ Mer-en-Jehuti (Manetho) wrote that "The Seventh Dynasty consisted of seventy kings of Memphis, who reigned for 70 days."¹¹

Kmt's mines and quarries grew silent, and great temples were no longer constructed. River transport along the Nile came to a virtual halt and poverty became widespread. This relatively obscure age of prevailing instability and popular discontent, known as Kmt's First Intermediate Period, lasted about 140 years and comprised Dynasties VII through X. It was during the First Intermediate Period that the Kametic religious literature known as the *Coffin Texts* appeared.

During Dynasties IX and X (ca. 2160-2040 B.C.E.), domestic order was partially restored to much of Kmt through the authority of an African family based at Henen-nesut (Herakleopolis). Mer-en-Jehuti described the first king of Dynasty IX, who may have been a governor of the Twentieth Nome of Upper Kmt, as "more cruel than all his predecessors, and visited the whole of Egypt with dire disasters."¹² Of the eighteen monarchs of Dynasties IX and X, the best known members include: Kheti I, Kheti II, Neferkare, Kheti III, and Merikare.

Ancient Kmt's Second Golden Age, the Middle Kingdom, the significant period in Kamite history encompassing Dynasties XI (ca. 2134-1991 B.C.E.) and XII (1991-1786 B.C.E.), was founded by the Mentuhoteps and Intefs--a distinguished and aggressive family of African nobles from Waset, the then unheralded city in Kmt's Scepter nome that the Greeks were to call Thebes.

When Nebhepetre Mentuhotep II assumed the throne of Upper Kmt around 2060 B.C.E., his house was only able to claim hegemony over Southern Kmt. Under his determined and able leadership however, this situation changed dramatically and quickly and early in his reign the Southerners began their most sustained and ultimately successful drive for the reunification of the whole of Kmt.

This was accomplished in 2040 B.C.E., along with reestablishment of a strong central monarchy. Kmt, once again, was united under a single royal house, with Nebhepetre Mentuhotep II proclaimed as the nation's undisputed king.¹³

In 1991 B.C.E., another Southerner, Sehetepibre Amenemhet I (1991-1971 B.C.E.) founded Kamite Dynasty XII. During his reign, for administrative purposes, the capital of Kmt was transferred from Waset north to It-Tawy ('Holder-of-the-Two Lands'). Of the eight monarchs of Dynasty XII, the first six each had reigns of more than nineteen years.

Nubkaure Amenemhet II (1929-1895 B.C.E.) dedicated a temple in Sinai to the goddess Het-Heru, and sent an expedition to Punt. Khakaure Senusret III (1878-1843 B.C.E.) was a formidable militarist. Nymare Amenemhet III (1843-1797 B.C.E.) raised two pyramids and commissioned the construction of the monument that came to be called the Egyptian Labyrinth. The Labyrinth must have been one of the largest buildings in antiquity, and contained three thousand individual rooms--fifteen hundred below the ground and fifteen hundred above the ground.

Herodotus (ca. 485-425 B.C.E.), the Greek historian author of the first significant prose work in European literature, wrote that the Labyrinth surpassed the pyramids, and noted that, "I have seen this building, and it is beyond my power to describe; it must have cost more in labor and money than all the walls and public works of the Greeks put together."¹⁴ Petrie, who excavated the site in 1888, provided additional information on this extraordinary African edifice:

"These mere figures will not signify readily to the mind the vast extent of construction; but when we compare it with the greatest of the other Egyptian temples it could be somewhat realised. On that space could be erected the great hall of Karnak, and all the successive temples adjoining it, and the great court and pylons of it; also the temple of Mut, and that of Khonsu, and that of Amenhotep III at Karnak; also the two great temples of Luxor; and still there would be room for the whole of the Ramesseum. In short, all the temples on the east bank of Thebes, and one of the largest on the west bank, might be placed together in the one area.... Here we certainly have a site worthy of the renown which the labyrinth acquired."¹⁵

Following Dynasty XII, Kmt experienced her Second Intermediate Period. It has even been suggested that the Dynasty XIII kings were actually elected as rulers for indefinite Periods of time.¹⁶ Dynasty XIII was based at Waset. Even more obscure than Dynasty XIII, Kametic Dynasty XIV was based at Ineb-hedj (Memphis). Mer-en-Jehuti provides a combined total of 136 monarchs for both dynasties.¹⁷ The end of Dynasty XIV coincided with the general collapse of Kmt's central government.

A disorganized Kmt obviously was not prepared for its national defense and unfortunately the Second Intermediate Period occurred at a time of serious upheaval and migrations in Western Asia. Capitalizing on Kmt's internal disarray were the Hyksos--the Rulers of Foreign Lands--who proceeded to occupy the country in force. According to Mer-en-Jehuti (Manetho):

“Unexpectedly, from the regions of the East, invaders of obscure race marched in confidence of victory against our land. By main force they easily seized it without striking a blow; and having overpowered the rulers of the land, they burned our cities ruthlessly, razed to the ground the temples of the Deities, and treated all the natives with cruel hostility, massacring some and leading into slavery the wives and children of others. Finally, they appointed as king one of their number.”¹⁸

The Hyksos occupied Kmt for more than a century, and constituted Dynasties XV and XVI. During Dynasty XVII they remained dominant in northern Kmt, while in southern Kmt the Blacks were intensifying their national liberation struggle. Among the principal leaders of this struggle were: King Seqenenre Tao I, Queen Tetisheri, King Seqenenre Tao II, Queen Ahhotep I, and King Wadjkheperre Kamose. Generally speaking, and in this period in particular, it should be stressed that the women of the royal Kamite families exercised considerable influence and occupied positions of great authority.¹⁹ Queen Tetisheri of Dynasty XVII is one such example:

“Tetisheri must be looked upon, therefore, as in every way a predecessor of that remarkable line of XVIIIth dynasty queens whose rights and prerogatives were so high that they were virtual rulers of the country. Presumably it was in them that the family strain was purest and through them that the inheritance passed. Most of them survived their husbands, and in widowhood held enhanced influence. For about a century the royal family was to all intents and purposes a virtual matriarchate. The active, warlike functions and the ritualistic offices were the men's, and officially they took precedence, but a large share in actual government lay in the hands of this line of women.

Tetisheri is not only the earliest of this line whose name has survived--she must have actually headed it....She was the ancestress of a line of women famous in Egyptian history: Ahhotep, Ahmose-Nefretiri, Ahhotep II, Ahmose and finally Hatshepsut with whose ambitions the female line of the royal family reached its climax and suffered its eclipse.”²⁰

Under the inspired leadership of Ahmose I and his wife and queen, Ahmose-Nefertari (whose veneration continued for more than six hundred years after her death), the Africans finally gathered the strength to eject the Hyksos. King Ahmose I and Ahmose-Nefertari are therefore recognized as the founders of Dynasty XVIII--the beginning of Kmt's Third Golden Age.

Usually referred to as the New Kingdom, sometimes designated as the Age of Empire, this epoch comprised Dynasties XVIII through XX, and lasted from about 1570 B.C.E. to 1080 B.C.E. Based at Waset, it was during Dynasty XVIII that Kmt, out of a strong desire to guarantee its national security, established itself as a militant world power with the status of a large empire. Undoubtedly, Dynasty XVIII was probably the apogee of Kamite might and influence. There were major expeditions to Punt and important economic relations were maintained with Minoan Crete, Bronze Age Cyprus and Mycenaean Greece. Much of Southwest Asia was subjugated and reduced to vassalage.

In addition to Ahmose I and Ahmose-Nefertari, Dynasty XVIII was the age of: the great Makare Hatshepsut, the determined and capable female sovereign who sent an expedition to Punt; Senenmut, 'Overseer of Works' during the reign of Makare Hatshepsut and the architect of Hatshepsut's mortuary temple at Waset; Menkheperre Thutmose III, the redoubtable warrior-king who personally directed seventeen military campaigns and extended the Kamite empire from the Upper Nile to the Upper Euphrates; Menkheprure Thutmose IV, who removed the sand from around Hor-m-akhet (the 'Great Sphinx'); Nebmare Amenhotep III ('The Magnificent'), who reigned for thirty-eight years at the peak of Dynasty XVIII; Queen Tiye, 'Great Royal Wife' of Amenhotep III; Amenhotep (son of Hapu), scribe, government official, and architect during the reign of Nebmare Amenhotep III; Akhenaten, who orchestrated one of the world's most dramatic religious reformations and during whose reign the Kamite empire was allowed to wither and decay; and Nebkheprure Tutankhamen ("King Tut"), the famous "boy-king," who held the throne for only nine years but the contents of whose tomb the world continues to marvel at.

Kamite Dynasty IXX was founded by Menpehtyre Ramses I, who reigned only briefly. Ramses I was succeeded on the throne by his son, Menmare Seti I, under whom efforts were made to revive the Empire. Clearly though, the single most towering figure of Kamite Dynasty IXX was Usermare Ramses II--commonly known as "Ramses the Great." The sixty-seven year reign of Ramses II was for Kmt an era of general prosperity, stable government and exceptional construction projects. ²¹ The dominance of Amen was restored and his priests firmly reinstated. Ramses II was actually deified in his own lifetime, and it was largely through the unrelenting projection of his own personality that both Dynasties IXX and XX are often generally referred to today as the "Ramesside Dynasties."

Following Ramses II, the stature of Kmt, once again, began to deteriorate. Baenre Merneptah, the thirteenth son and successor of Ramses II, was forced to repel a major foray into Kmt by a violent confederation of Sea Peoples--the perpetrators of rampant devastation in the eastern Mediterranean and northern Africa during the later portion of the second millennium B.C.E.

During Dynasty XX, Usermare-Meryamen Ramses III led Kmt's defense against three desperate invasions of Libyan tribesmen and the nomadic Sea Peoples. Shortly thereafter, Kmt experienced prolonged labor troubles among government workers and an inflationary rise in wheat prices.

During the middle of Dynasty XX occurred a sharp decline in the value of copper and bronze, accompanied by a gradual weakening of central authority. Kamite royal tombs were apparently robbed with impunity by high officials, and the country may have experienced a severe famine. It is probably no coincidence that it was in Dynasty XX that the craft of mummification reached its zenith.

At the beginning of Dynasty XXI, the power in Kmt was apportioned between the priesthood of Amen, which ruled over Upper Kmt, and northern princes who ruled Lower Kmt from the eastern Delta. Dynasty XXII was a Libyan dynasty.²² Its first ruler, Hedjkheperre Sheshonq I (946-925 B.C.E.), invaded Palestine and plundered Jerusalem. During Dynasty XXIII, local rulers proliferated in Kmt. In Dynasty XXIV, the Libyan prince Tefnakhte of northern Kmt made a treaty with Hosea of Samaria against Assyria; his son, Bakenrenef (Bocchoris), supported the king of Israel against Assyria. This turbulent era, comprising Dynasties XI through XXIV, during which civil wars were waged intermittently, lasted about three centuries and constituted Kmt's Third Intermediate Period.

It was only with the rise and enthronement of the Kushite rulers of Dynasty XXV that a powerful movement of cultural revival and economic resurgence in Kmt was sparked.²³ Dynasty XXV, Kmt's Fourth Golden Age, was based at Napata, near the fourth cataract. The entire line of Dynasty XXV kings were men of great piety, confident in the belief that they were the true seat of Kamite sovereignty.

About 750 B.C.E., the Kushite king Kashta made a pilgrimage to the Amen Temples at Waset, where he was hailed 'King of Upper and Lower Kmt.' A daughter of Kashta, Amenirdas I, was installed in Waset with the title of 'Divine Wife of the God Amen.' In 730 B.C.E., Kashta's son and successor, Piye (Piankhi), conquered Upper and Lower Kmt, but chose to govern from Kush (Upper Nubia between the third and sixth cataracts). Finally, about 715 B.C.E., Shabaka, Piye's brother and successor, completed the total reunification of Kmt and ruled from Waset, the head of a stupendous Kushite empire that extended from the Mediterranean southwards to the confluence of the Blue and White Niles. It was during this time that the ancient creation story currently known as the Memphite Theology was copied on a granite slab.²⁴ During the reign of Shabaka's successor, Shabataka, the demotic script was introduced.

Perhaps the most outstanding sovereign of Dynasty XXV was Taharka (690-664 B.C.E.). As a prince he is believed to have led an African expedition to Spain.²⁵ As King, he commanded military campaigns in Western Asia to save his Jewish allies from destruction at the hands of the Assyrians.²⁶ As "A loving son, Taharka at one point sent for his mother, resident in far-off Napata to visit him, so that she could enjoy the sight of her son on the throne of Upper and Lower Egypt."²⁷

It is regrettable that so much of the focus of the Dynasty XXV monarchs had to be directed towards fending off a menacing nation of foreign aggressors-the Assyrians. The Assyrians equipped their armies with iron weapons and, unlike many nations of antiquity, placed no heavy dependence on foreign mercenaries whose loyalties might shift at any time. The bulk of the Assyrian armies consisted of archers, heavily armed spearmen, shield bearers, horsemen, and heavy chariots. The Assyrian armies were well trained and utilize battering rams and formidable siege machines. For several decades the Africans held their own against the Assyrians, but in 671 B.C.E. Assyrian legions invaded Kmt and ransacked Ineb-hedj (Memphis). In 663 B.C.E., Assyrian armies again invaded Kmt and this time pillaged Waset, massacred its inhabitants, and emptied the temples of their treasures. According to Diop:

“The fall of the most venerated city of all Antiquity aroused deep emotion in the world of that time and marked the end of the Nubian Sudanese or Twenty-fifth Ethiopian Dynasty. That date also marked the decline of Black political supremacy in Antiquity and in history.”²⁸

In 658 B.C.E., Psametik I, initially an Assyrian vassal, established Kamite Dynasty XXVI. With the intervention of Greek mercenaries, he eventually managed to successfully discard the yoke of Assyrian domination. The kings of Dynasty XXVI, which was based at Sau (Sais) in the western Delta, tried to restore Kmt's former grandeur by promoting commercial expansion. Large numbers of foreigners, particularly Greeks, settled in Kmt during Dynasty XXVI. Dynasty XXVI was also a period in which numerous foreign scholars, including Thales (ca. 636-546 B.C.E.) and Pythagoras (ca. 582-507 B.C.E.), studied in Kmt.²⁹ Additionally, it was during Dynasty XXVI that the prophet Jeremiah (ca. 628-586 B.C.E.) sojourned in Kmt, a bronze statue bearing the name of King Sendji of Dynasty II was made, and the near-legendary Imhotep of Dynasty III was deified as a God of science and medicine.

Dynasty XXVI was an era of martial conflicts in which Kmt was largely inadequate. During the long reign of Psametik I, the entire military garrison at Abu (Elephantine) deserted to the king of Kush, who is said to have provided them with land grants and wives in the southern portion of the kingdom. In 605 B.C.E., the Kamite military was soundly defeated by the Babylonians at the battle of Carchemish. The Babylonians never successfully occupied Kmt, but they remained a constant threat to the security of the country until the Babylonians themselves were eclipsed by the rising strength of Persia.

In 525 B.C.E., the Persians, under Cambyses II, invaded, conquered, and incorporated Kmt into the Persian Empire. It was during Dynasty XXVII--the time of the Persian occupation, that Hecataeus of Miletus (ca. 510 B.C.E.) and Herodotus of Halicarnassus (ca. 450 B.C.E.) visited Kmt. The short-lived Dynasty XXVIII (404-399 B.C.E.), which consisted of only one king--Amyrtaeus, was based at Sau (Sais). It was in Dynasty XXIX that Plato (428-347 B.C.E.) studied in Kmt, while Democritus (ca. 460-370 B.C.E.) pursued his education in Kmt in Dynasty XXX.

In 343 B.C.E., King Nectanebo II was defeated by the Persians under Ataxerxes III. In 332 B.C.E., came the invasion and occupation of Kmt under Alexander of Macedon (356-323 B.C.E.) and the Ptolemaic Dynasty (305-30 B.C.E.). As for Alexander himself, 'Records say he wanted to be buried in Egypt's Siwa Oasis; near Libya, but finally was encased in a gold coffin in Alexandria, the Mediterranean city he founded.'³⁰

One of the most brilliant and influential intellectuals of the early period of Ptolemaic rule in Kmt was the celebrated African scholar and priest--Mer-en-Jehuti--more widely known as Manetho of Sebennytos (ca. 275 B.C.E.). The Lower Kamite city of Sebennytos had been the nation's capital during Dynasty XXX. Manetho, whose authority has been acknowledged several times in this essay, is credited with having written in Greek *The Sacred Book, An Epitome of Physical Doctrines*, and *Aegyptiaca (The History of Egypt)*. It was in the latter work--still the primary fabric connecting Kamite history--that the famed African scholar organized the monarchs of Kmt into its present dynastic structure.³¹

Notes

1. Among the most acclaimed nineteenth century advocates of the African origin of Nile Valley civilizations were Martin Robison Delany and Edward Wilmot Blyden. Delany (1812-1885), often called "the father of Black nationalism," might also be regarded as a nascent Kmtologist. As early as 1879, Delany wrote that, "This admission of the hieroglyphic representations to be found on the temples and monuments of Egypt of the advanced status of the negro race, settles at once the controversy, and leaves only to be proven the fact, that the earliest settlers, builders of the pyramids, sculptors of the sphinxes, and original god-kings, were blacks of the negro race." Martin R. Delany, *Principles of Ethnology: Origins of Races and Color with an Archaeological Compendium of Ethiopian and Egyptian Civilization, From Years of Careful Examination and Enquiry* (Philadelphia: Harper & Brother, 1879; rpt., Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1991), 64. Delany's racial consciousness was reflected in the names he gave his children, which included Ramses Placido--after both the pharaoh Ramses II and the Cuban poet and freedom fighter.

Edward Wilmot Blyden (1832-1912) wrote and travelled extensively. During a visit to Egypt in 1866, he recorded that, "Feelings came over me far different from those which I have felt when looking at the mighty works of European genius. I felt that I had a peculiar heritage in the Great Pyramid built...by the enterprising sons of Ham, from which I descended. The blood seemed to flow faster through my veins. I seemed to hear the echo of those illustrious Africans. I seemed to feel the impulse from those stirring characters who sent civilization to Greece--the teachers of the father of poetry, history, and mathematics--Homer, Herodotus, and Euclid. I seemed to catch the sound of the 'stately steppings' of Jupiter, as, with his brilliant celestial retinue, he perambulates the land on a visit to my ancestors, the 'blameless Ethiopians'. I felt lifted out of the commonplace grandeur of modern times; and, could my voice have reached every African in the world, I would have earnestly addressed him...: 'Retake your Fame.'" Edward W. Blyden, *From West Africa to Palestine* (Freetown: T.J. Sawyer, 1873), 112.

2. The chronologies and dates given for each of Kmt's major periods, dynasties, and kings, are approximate calculations from Manetho, the Royal Annals of the Palermo Stone, the *Table of Karnak King-List*, the *Table of Abydos King-List*, the *Table of Sakkara*, the *Turin Canon of Kings*, and other ancient and contemporary sources, and are the subjects of continuing debate and controversy.

3. Michael Rice, *Egypt's Making* (London: Routledge, 1991), 25. "The culture which grew and flourished in the Nile Valley was wholly autochthonous. It grew out of the lives and preoccupations of the cattle-rearing African peoples (black Africans, it must certainly be acknowledged) who were the true ancestors of the Pharaohs, in all their majesty and power. The Egyptians long held on to the recognition of their essentially African character...Egypt's decline began when these essentially African characteristics became diluted by incursions from outside the Valley." Rice, 221.

4. William Mathew Flinders Petrie, "The Origin of the XIIIth Dynasty," *Ancient Egypt* (June 1924), 42.

5. Cheikh Anta Diop, *Civilization or Barbarism*, eds. H.J. Salemson and M. de Jager, trans. Yaa-Lengi Meema Ngemi, (Westport: Lawrence Hill, 1991), 108.

6. "Later king lists refer to whole dynasties before the unification of Egypt, but the names cannot be connected to any specific monuments, events or people. They are dynasties without substance preceded by the entirely mythological kingship of the Deities. Until now, the lack of direct evidence has made the study of these early sovereignties largely speculative. Direct evidence for kings in the Nile Valley before the reign of Narmer has finally emerged in context...Qustul in Lower Nubia, very near the present-day border of Egypt and the Sudan." Bruce Williams, "Lost Pharaohs of Nubia," *Archaeology* 33, No. 5 (1980), 13. In a more recent report, Williams reaffirmed that "The persons buried in the great tombs of Cemetery L at Oustul were pharaohs." Bruce Williams, *The A-Group Royal Cemetery at Qustul: Cemetery L* (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1986), 163.

7. Rice, 145

8. According to an Arab proverb, "All the world fears Time, but Time fears the Pyramids." Cited by Will Durant, *Our Oriental Heritage* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1954), 150. Napoleon Bonaparte calculated that there was enough stone in the Giza pyramids to build a wall surrounding the entire country of France. "According to his calculations, the three pyramids on the Giza plateau contained enough stone to build a wall, measuring ten feet in height and one foot in width, around the whole of France. The mathematician Monge, who was among the savants accompanying Napoleon on this campaign, is alleged to have confirmed this calculation." I.E.S. Edwards, *The Pyramids of Egypt* (New York: Viking, 1972), 82.

9. "Egyptian architectural work implies mechanical and technical knowledge that specialists have not yet finished discussing. The scholars know that nobody is yet capable of giving a satisfactory explanation of the manner in which the Egyptians proceeded with the construction of the Great Pyramid of Khufu (Cheops)." Diop, *Civilization or Barbarism*, 285.

10. "During the VIth Dynasty; a general paralysis of the state's economy and administration resulted in the cities as well as in the countryside. Thus, the end of the VIth Dynasty saw the first people's uprising of certain date in universal history. The destitute of Memphis, the capital and sanctuary of Egyptian royalty, sacked the town, robbed the rich, and drove them into the streets. There was a true reversal of the social conditions and the financial situations. The movement rapidly spread to other cities. It appears that the city of Sais was temporarily governed by a group of ten notables." Diop, 141.

11. *Manetho*, trans. W.G. Waddell (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1940), 55. Manetho's claim is almost certainly an exaggeration, but it is nevertheless a dramatic assertion of the weakness and uncertainty of the formerly stable nation-state. The Kametic nomes, once the official administrative districts of a strong centralized government, had returned to their original status as small independent states. Mass unrest and anarchy became the order of the day.

The Prophecies of Neferti reflect the turmoil and despair of the times: "Every mouth is full of 'how I wish.' All happiness has vanished; The land is ruined, its fate decreed, Deprived of produce, lacking in crops, What was made has been unmade. One seizes a man's goods, gives them to an outsider, I show you the master in need, the outsider stated, The lazy stuffs himself, the active is needy. One gives only with hatred, To silence the mouth that speaks; To answer a speech the arm thrusts a stick; One speaks by killing him." Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 142.

12. *Manetho*, 61-63.

13. Nebhepetre Mentuhotep II was the dominant personality of the early Middle Kingdom. In describing a statue of this king, art historian Jules Taylor wrote that: "The eyes stare out with hypnotic intensity from the black painted face. Its bodily proportions are compact, yet massive, so that the arms which are folded across the chest, and the fists which clutch the royal staffs, the crook and the flail, seem indeed capable, if they were invested with life, of joining and holding together the Two Lands, from the cataracts to the Delta. Under the short white cloak he wears, Mentuhotep's legs are disproportionately large and muscular, as though to dramatize their owner's unquestionable and timeless steadfastness to the ground he occupies." Jules Taylor, "The Black Image in Egyptian Art," *Journal of African Civilizations* 1, No. 1 (1979), 36.

14. Herodotus, *The Histories*, rev. ed., trans. Aubrey de Selincourt (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 188. Herodotus also wrote that, "The Egyptians who live in the cultivated parts of the country, by their practice of keeping records of the past, have made themselves the most learned of any nation of which I have had experience." Herodotus, 158.

15. Petrie, *Hawara, Biahmu, and Arsinoe* (London: Field & Tuer, 1889), 5.

16. John Van Seters, *The Hyksos* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 95.

17. Manetho, 75.

18. Manetho, 79.

19. "The foremost and most significant fact to bear in mind when dealing with the issue of women and leadership in ancient Kemet (Egypt) is simply that there was equality between men and women. The woman had political power as well as a general voice in running the country, as did her sisters in other parts of Africa. The woman had the opportunity to hold high office and was often very wealthy and prosperous. This was in contrast to the situation of her counterpart, the woman of the Near East and Asia." Diedre Wimby, "The Female Horuses and Great Wives of Kemet," *Black Women in Antiquity*, ed. Ivan Van Sertima (New Brunswick: Transaction Press, 1988), 36.

Probably the most consistently eloquent and scholarly of all the writers who have addressed the extraordinarily prominent role of African women in world history was Dr. John Henrik Clarke.

20. Herbert E. Winlock, "On Queen Tetisheri, Grandmother of Ahmose I," *Ancient Egypt* (1st Qtr. 1921), 16.

Hatshepsut came from a long line of dynamic women. Among these was Queen Ahmose-Nefertari, wife of Ahmose, founder of the Eighteenth Dynasty. Ahmose-Nefertari was given considerable authority in the cult of the King of the gods when she was made God's Wife of Amon, a position that held a chief role as a priestess in the national cult center and was provided with goods and property legally documented and published for all to see on a monumental stela set up in the temple of Amon at Karnak.... Her royal titles included the exceptional Female Chieftain of Upper and Lower Egypt, which makes it likely that after her husband died she ruled as regent for her son, Amenhotep I.... Ahmose-Nefertari outlived Amenhotep and was honored as well by his picked successor, Thutmose I, when he set up a colossal statue of the old queen in the court he built at Karnak." Barbara S. Lesko, "Women's Monumental Mark on Ancient Egypt," *Biblical Archaeologist* 54, No. 1 (1991), 12.

21. Some of the world's most outstanding African-centric scholars have placed pronounced emphasis on Kamite Dynasty XIX, with major focus on the almost larger than life Ramses II. Drusilla Dunjee Houston (1876-1941), wrote that "Rameses II...was the Sesostris of the Greeks. He reigned sixty-seven years. The temple of Abydos records the names of sixty daughters and fifty-nine sons. He built two magnificent temples in Nubia and part of the temples of Karnak and Luxor." Drusilla Dunjee Houston, *Wonderful Ethiopians of the Ancient Cushite Empire* (1926; rpt. Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1985), 105.

Chancellor Williams wrote that, "In 1320 B.C. the Age of Ramses began. This time, a line of great leaders was not followed by a line of weaklings. This was the Nineteenth Dynasty 1320-1200 B.C." Williams, 117. John Henrik Clarke emphasizes that the pharaohs of the 19th Dynasty, especially Rameses II, restored Egypt's building-age and took it to the apex of its achievement as the best-known state of the ancient world." John Henrik Clarke, Foreword to *The African Called Rameses ("The Great") II*, by Yosef A.A. ben-Jochannan (New York: Ben-Jochannan, 1990), 13.

The venerable cultural historian John G. Jackson observed that, "The Nineteenth Dynasty began with the reign of Hormhab, but the great ruler of this dynasty was Rameses II. In a reign of sixty-six years this monarch conquered extensive territories in Western Asia and built colossal temples in the Nile Valley." John G. Jackson, *Ages of Gold and Silver* (Austin: American Atheist Press, 1990), 53. According to Yosef A.A. ben-Jochannan, "If there is one solitary 'pharaoh' I must qualify it is Rameses II." Yosef A.A. ben-Jochannan, *The African Called Rameses ("The Great") II*. 25. Harmonizing with ben-Jochannan, Cheikh Anta Diop wrote that "The highest point of Egyptian history was the Nineteenth Dynasty of Ramses II." Cheikh Anta Diop, "The Beginnings of Man and Civilization," *Great African Thinkers*, eds. Ivan Van Sertima and Larry Obadele Williams (New Brunswick: Transaction Press, 1986), 341.

22. Dr. Chancellor Williams (1893-1992), former professor of African History at Howard University and the author of *The Destruction of Black Civilization*--a classic work based on sixteen years of documentary field research in which he addressed the controversial question of the ethnicity of the Libyans. According to Williams, "They were, first of all, Western Ethiopians, then heavily Berber, Mongolian, Arab, a sprinkling of Hebrews and other Asiatic peoples, and then, of course, the resulting Afro-Asians. The ethnic composition of the Libyan was about the same as that of early Egypt, with the exception that there were fewer Europeans and more Mongolians. Libya was once so nearly all black that to be called a Libyan meant Black. So the Libyan dynasties during this period could have been predominantly white, Black, Afro-Asian or a combination of all three, depending upon what faction was in ascendancy at the time." Chancellor Williams, *The Destruction of Black Civilization*, rev. ed (Chicago: Third World Press, 1974), 118-19.

23. "Around 750 BC, the Napatan dynasts of Cush under Piankhy and his immediate successors took a giant leap forward onto the world spotlight by their pacification and reunification of Egypt. At this juncture in history, that part of Upper Egypt south of Thebes had become a part of Cush but the rest of Egypt had disintegrated into mutually warring petty kingdoms. We cannot delve into this chapter of Egyptian history in any detail but suffice to say that when Piankhy undertook to reunify Egypt he was not looked upon as a usurper or foreign conqueror but rather as a deliverer. As a pious and devoted follower of Amon-Ra, his intercession was, for the most part, welcomed. With the entrance of the kings of Cush into Egyptian history we have the inauguration of the 25th or 'Ethiopian' dynasty of Pharaohs. The 25th dynasty sparked a renaissance in an otherwise moribund Egyptian culture, with some of Egypt's most vigorous art and monument building emerging in this period. There is evidence too of a program of world-wide commerce and exploration that was initiated during the 25th dynasty." Larry Obadele Williams and Charles S. Finch, "The Great Queens of Ethiopia," *Black Women in Antiquity*, ed. Ivan Van Sertima (New Brunswick: Transaction Press, 1988), 21.

24. "The text called the Memphite Theology, transmitted by the stela of Shabaka, is an essay on philosophical and theological reflection of Ptah's priests in his Memphis sanctuary." Theophile Obenga, *Ancient Egypt and Black Africa* (London: Karnak House, 1992), 25. "It is actually a text recopied during the reign of Shabaka in the 25th Dynasty and is concerned primarily with the divine basis for governance. The extant text is badly damaged and only a small part of the original is intelligible." Jacob H. Carruthers, "The Wisdom of Governance in Kemet," *Kemet and the African Worldview* (Los Angeles: University of Sankore, 1986), 6.

25. "The second major intrusion of an African army into Spain before the Moors, occurs sometime around 700 B.C. during the period of the 25th dynasty in Egypt, when the Ethiopian Taharka was a young general, but before he had been ceded the throne by his uncle Shabataka. It is this same Taharka (referred to in early Spanish chronicles as Tarraco) that led a garrison into Spain and invaded it during this Period. We have a clear and indisputable reference to this in a manuscript by Florian de Ocampo Cronica General published in Medina del Campo in 1553. The name of the invading general is given as Tarraco.

He is not only identified as head of the Ethiopian army. The reference is more specific. It says he was later to become a King of Egypt. The name, the period, the history and fact of his generalship and his later kingship of Egypt, his Ethiopian origin and the wide-ranging trade and exploration of the Ethiopian in this period, all attest to the validity of this reference." Ivan Van Sertima "The Moor in Africa and Europe," *Golden Age of the Moor*, ed. Ivan Van Sertima (New Brunswick: Transaction Press, 1992), 2.

Megasthenes (ca. 300 B.C.E.) may preserve a similar tradition concerning Taharka in Europe. Megasthenes wrote that "Tearcon (Tabarka?) the Ethiopian, extended their conquests as far as Europe...and carried his arms as far as the Pillars: to which also it is said Tearcon arrived." Indian Fragments, in *Ancient Fragments*, ed. I.P. Cory (Minneapolis: Savage, 1975), 227.

26. Taharka may have been the only king of Dynasty XXV to be mentioned in the Bible: "And then he heard say of Tirhakah, king of Ethiopia, Behold, he is come out to fight against thee." 2 *Kings* 19: 9. "And he heard say concerning Tirhakah king of Ethiopia, He is come forth to make war with thee." *Isaiah* 37: 9.

27. Timothy Kendall and Susan K. Doll, *Kush: Lost Kingdom of the Nile* (Brockton: Brockton Art Museum, 1982), 10. "In the Sudanese part of their empire the entourages of Kushites frequently included their mothers, wives, sisters and female cousins. This was not so in Egypt proper, though the Kushite Pharaohs were assisted at Thebes by the divine votaresses-princesses vowed to virginity with the god Amon as their only spouse. Conceded quasi-royal privileges, the Amenirdises and Shepenoupets formed a kind of parallel dynasty with succession from aunt to niece." Jean Leclant, "The Empire of Kush: Napata and Meroe," *UNESCO General History of Africa*, vol. 2, ed. Gamal Mokhtar (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 283.

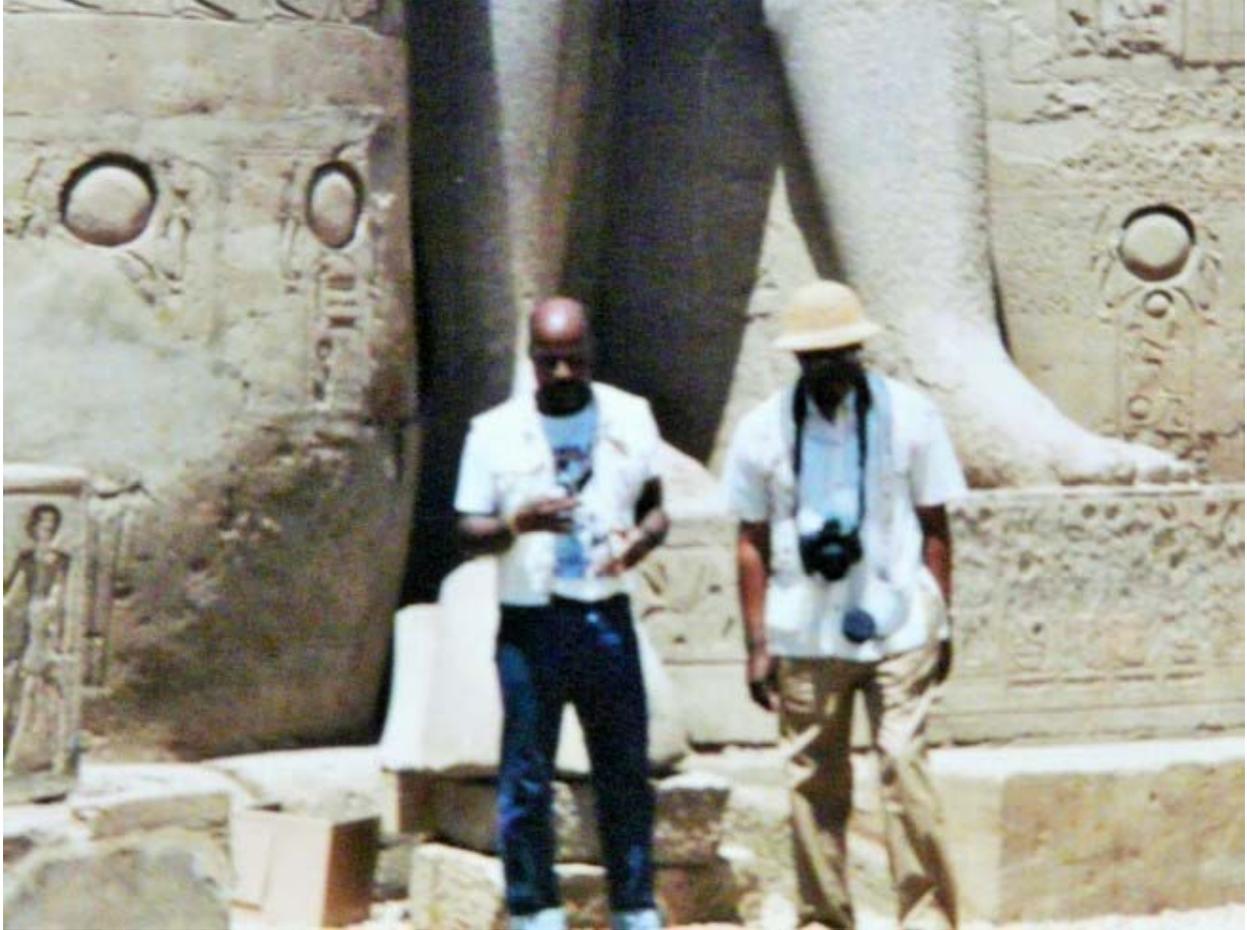
"In our look at the 25th dynasty, we can get a sense of the very real prominence, both politically and religiously, of the queens of Cush during this Period. They seemed to wield power that was almost unprecedented in Egyptian annals and are instrumental, even after Cush has retired from Egypt, in the transition to the 26th dynasty." Williams and Finch, 27.

28. Cheikh Anta Diop, *African Origin of Civilization*, ed. and trans. Mercer Cook (Westport: Lawrence Hill, 1914), 221.

29. "Greece owes everything to Egypt. Egypt was teacher to Greece in its infancy. The Greeks themselves, their most eminent scholars, admitted it...It was Thales who began the cycle by going to Egypt and he admits it. He then told Pythagoras who followed in his footsteps." Cheikh Anta Diop, *Great African Thinkers*, 232.

30. Mimi Mann, "Egyptian Desert May Hold Untold Treasures on the Scale of Tut's Tomb," *Los Angeles Times*, August 6, 1989, A7.

31. "If it had been my purpose to mention the early historians on Africa in order of importance, Manetho, the African historian, would have headed the list." Chancellor Williams, 385. Although Manetho's original books have been lost, numerous fragments are preserved, and are found principally in the works of Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (ca. 70 C.E.), and Christian writers Sextus Julius Africanus (ca. 220) and Eusebius (ca. 340), "with isolated passages in Plutarch, Theophilus, Aelian, Porphyrius, Diogenes, Laertius, Theodoretus, Lydus, Malalas, the Scholia to Plato, and the *Etymologicum Magnum*." W.G. Waddell, Introduction to *Manetho*, vii. Subsequent writers modified Manetho's work by adding a thirty-first dynasty, a subdivision of the period of Persian domination.



Runoko Rashidi and Yosef ben-Jochannan in Luxor, Egypt.



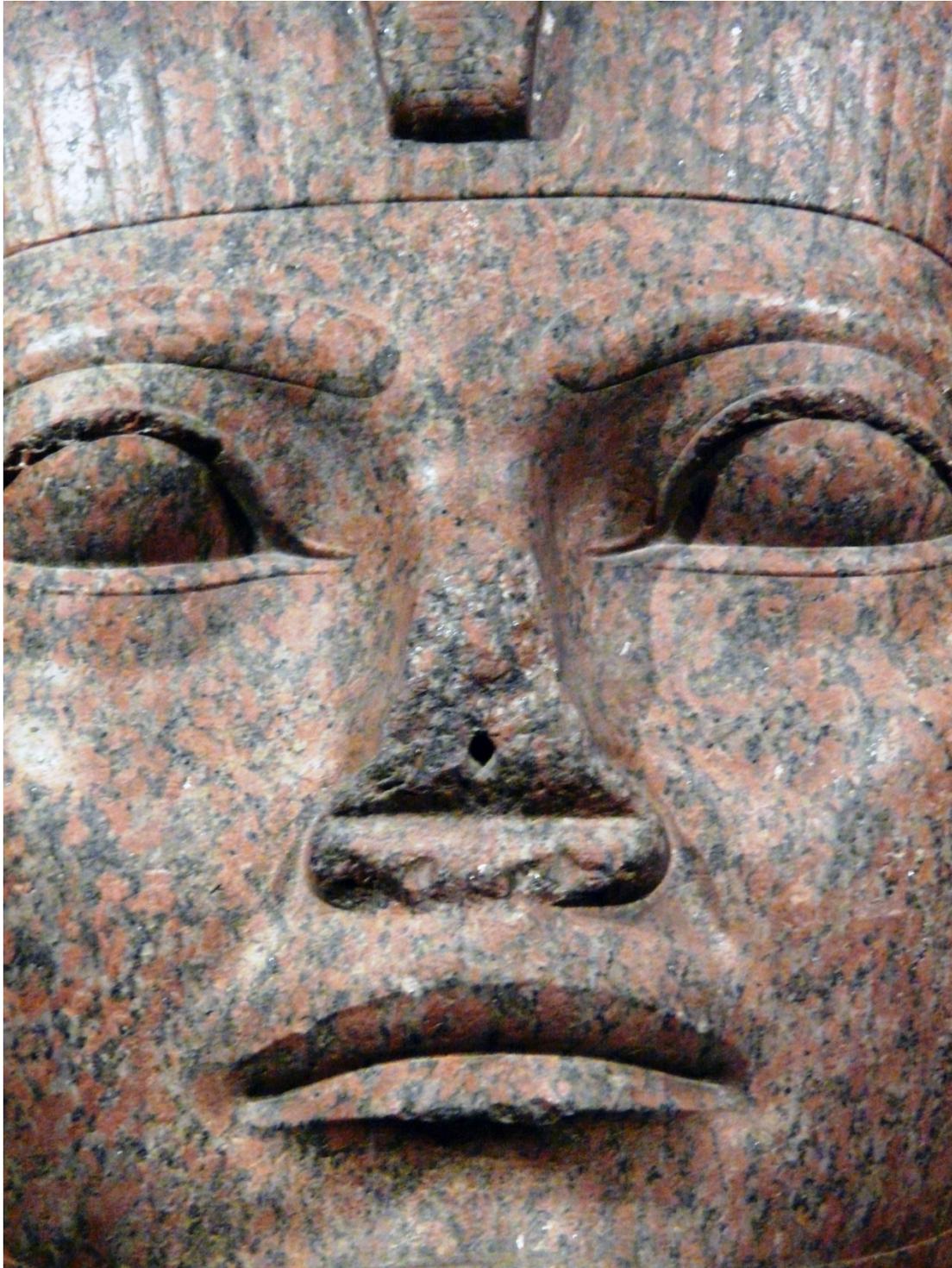
Khreduonkh, mother of Imhotep.
Musée du Louvre, Paris, France.
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A princess from Dynasty IV. Boston Museum of Fine Arts,
Boston, Massachusetts. Photo copyright by Runoko Rashidi.



An unknown pharaoh from the Middle Kingdom, circa 2000 BCE.
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Nubkaure Amenemhet II, circa 1920 BCE, Musée du Louvre, Paris, France.
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Seneferibre, circa 1800 BCE. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria.
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Nymare Amenemhet III, circa 1800 BCE. Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen, Denmark. Photo copyright by Runoko Rashidi.



Seti I, Abydos Temple, Egypt. Circa 1300 BCE. Photo copyright by Runoko Rashidi.



Usermare Ramses II. National Museum, Warsaw, Poland.
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A statue of Usemare II at the Ramesseum temple in Luxor, Egypt.
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Hair extensions. Circa 1300 BCE. Archaeology Museum, Florence, Italy.
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King Taharqa. Circa 690 BCE. Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen, Denmark.
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An unknown figure in Late Period Egypt. Date unknown. Egyptian Museum, Vatican.
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Runoko Rashidi and Yosef ben-Jochannan in Harlem, New York in February 2010.
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