Kingship as the framing context

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

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

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

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

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

Egypt's dominion (Figure 1:5). In literature and other texts, foreigners of different geographic origins are often treated in the same uniform, almost stereotypical way, for much the same reason. However, closer examination reveals that each foreign type

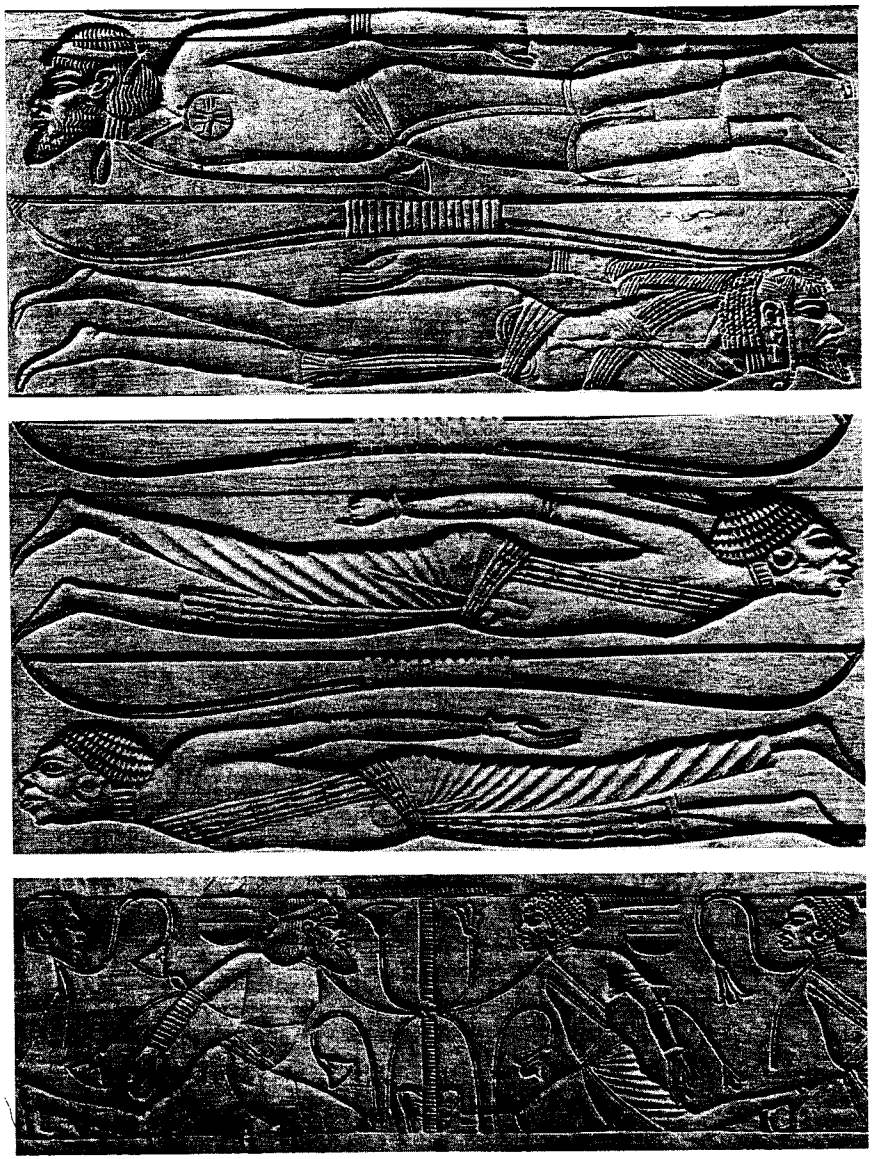

Figure 1:5 A typical collection of representative foreigners (from the "ceremonial" 'footstool' of Tutankhamun). Note from top to bottom: two bearded 'Libyans'; two 'clean-shaven' 'Nubians'; four kneeling 'Levantines' and 'Nubians' flanking the emblem of Egypt's own unity, tied round their necks with plant-stems (Desroches-Noblecourt 1989: 51, pl. xi).

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

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

Standardized Old Kingdom depictions of Libyans differ from those of the New Kingdom, but the two are clearly related. The dress, hairstyles and accoutrements assigned to Libyans are based on Libyan features also displayed in examples of Saharan rock painting of various dates (Hachid 2000: 54–55, 94–97, 106, fig. 120). However, it seems likely that the Egyptians reinterpreted the indigenous meanings of Libyan appearance in terms of their own prejudices and worldview. For example, Libyans were often depicted as nude, except for a so-called 'phallus sheath' (worn also by women! Hachid 2000: 94, figs. 87, 91, 97), whereas most foreigners were, like Egyptians, more modestly dressed. This may have conferred a certain animality upon Libyans, reinforced by their close association with animals as nomads, and the leather accoutrements worn by Old Kingdom Libyans or the leather cloaks worn by New Kingdom Libyans (necklets, chest bands, belt; Hachid 2000: 94, figs. 87, 88, 1st and 4th figs. from left, 91), which made them look like animals (Figure 1:6). Moreover, Libyans' gender was ambiguous from the Egyptian perspective; Old Kingdom Libyans had a slight beard, but wore their hair long and flowing, like Egyptian women (Hachid 2000: 94, fig. 87) or, if shorter – as in the New Kingdom – were elaborately dressed, again a characteristic of women rather than men to the Egyptians (Hachid 2000: fig. 91). These circumstances may explain why the insulting child-bearing metaphor was so frequently applied to Libyan enemies. Finally, the Libyans were, in some cases, uncircumcised, hence somewhat juvenile (and thus again akin to women), for to Egyptians and many foreign groups male circumcision marked the 'complete', fully socialized adult. To reinforce this point, New Kingdom Egyptians normally cut off the hand of slain enemies, in order to easily add up the total killed; but with slain Libyans they, presumably contemptuously, cut off the penises

Figure 1:6 Representations from the 'Book of Gates' of New Kingdom Egyptians, Asiatics and Nubians with the Libyan shown as nude under his robe (after Hachid 2000: 97, fig. 91).

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

Mining the sources

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

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

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

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

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

Naming lands

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