


THE DATE OF THE END OF THE OLD KINGDOM OF EGYPT


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HERODOTUS tells us of the queen Nitocris who avenged her brother murdered by the Egyptians.¹ This queen is mentioned by Manetho² as the last ruler of the Sixth Dynasty. Her predecessor Menthesuphis, who reigned for one year only after the extraordinarily long rule of Phiops II, may indeed have been her brother and husband. There is no evidence, however, for the historical truth of Herodotus' story, as we have no contemporary monuments from either the reigns of Menthesuphis or of Nitocris. The Menthesuphis of Manetho corresponds to a king *Mr·n·r^c Df³·m·s³·f* in the Abydos List of Kings (A No. 39), where he takes the same place just after Phiops II (A No. 38: *Nfr·k³·r^c*). His nomen in the Abydos List is apparently a late misinterpretation for *'nty·m·s³·f*,³ and his prenomen too may be erroneous since the predecessor of Phiops II, *Mr·n·r^c* in the lists of kings, bears exactly the same prenomen and nomen in the inscriptions of his pyramid.⁴ But the existence of this king is not doubtful, being proved by the testimony of all lists,

¹ Herod. II, 30: *Νίτωκρις. τὴν ἔλεγον τιμωρέουσαν ἀδελφεῶν, τὸν Αἰγύπτιοι βασιλεύοντά σφρων ἀπέκτειναν ἀποκτειναντες δε οὕτω ἐκείνη ἀπέδοσαν τὴν βασιληίην.*

² Only the version of Africanus is given here since Eusebius offers a mere deterioration in this passage.

³ Sethe and Gardiner, *ZÄS*, XLVII (1910), 50 ff.; Drioton-Vandier, *L'Égypte* (1952), pp. 232-33. 

df³ stands for  (the god 'Anty of Hieracon). *Μενθεσοῦφις* or *Μεθουσοῦφις* respectively is another misinterpretation of the same nomen taking the name of the god Month for 'Anty. A further misunderstanding (Sokar instead of 'Anty) is preserved probably in the variant *'Εχασκοσκόπας* given by Pseudo-Eratosthenes for this king.

⁴ Gauthier, *Livre des rois*, I, 165, No. VIII. It is extremely unlikely that two kings of the same dynasty—and even of all Pharaonic Egypt—should bear exactly the same names both prenomen and nomen, as pointed out by Winlock, *JEA*, X (1923), 214.

Manetho, Abydos, and the Royal Canon of Turin.⁵

Queen Nitocris is absent from the list of Abydos. The reason is, in my opinion, that probably she had not really been crowned as a king but rather reigned as a regent. We know of no prenomen of her. Thus the hypotheses identifying her with the *Ntri·k³·r^c* (No. 40)⁶ or with the *Mn·k³·r^c* (No. 41)⁷ of the Abydos List are very unlikely.

But the name of the queen occurs, as recognized already by Mariette,⁸ on the little fragment No. 43 of the Royal Canon at Turin. It is written here like all other royal names within a cartouche and with the

title of *nsw-bit*:⁹ 

and it is followed by three other names, *Nfr·k³*, *Nfr*, and *'Ib*. This fragment was

⁵ In the Canon the names of the kings of the Sixth Dynasty are lost, but the preserved figures of their regnal years show clearly their actual places. Thus the king in IV, 5 with a reign of 90 + x years can only be the *Φίωψ* of Manetho (with 94 years) and his successor with 1 year must be therefore the *Μενθεσοῦφις* who has 1 year too.

⁶ Stern, *ZÄS*, XXIII (1885), 92, and Meyer, *Ägyptische Chronologie* (1904), plate opposite p. 166.

⁷ Lieblein, *Recherches sur la chronologie*, p. 40; Petrie, *History*, I, 104 f.; Newberry, *JEA*, XXIX (1943), 51 ff. The latter proposes to identify her with the queen Neit whose pyramid was excavated at Saqqara (Jéquier, *Les pyramides des reines Neit et Apouit*, Le Caire 1933). But the name of Nitocris (Neit-*aqerty*) is different from that name; queen Neit was a daughter of Phiops I and a wife (and elder sister) of Phiops II. It seems almost impossible that she could have survived the 94 years of her younger husband and reigned as a sole ruler aged more than a hundred years.

⁸ *Revue archéol.*, 1849, p. 310. The doubts of Lesueur (*Chronologie des rois d'Égypte*, pp. 223 and 268), Stern (*ZÄS*, XXI [1883], 23 and XXIII [1885], 92 and Meyer, *Gesch. d. Alt. I*, 2 (1884), 104 (but no longer in the edition of 1909, pp. 216 and 218) were unfounded.

⁹ Note that this title is written by the scribe of the Canon carelessly also if the nomen is given and even in the case of kings who never bore it, e.g., the first rulers of Dynasty XI.

placed by Wilkinson¹⁰ in Column V adjoining Fragment 59 where it was still retained by Meyer in his *Ägyptische Chronologie* (1904).¹¹ In the new edition of the Royal Canon by Farina,¹² however, the fragment found its place in Column IV, ll. 10–13.¹³ Thus Nitocris stood now among the successors of the Sixth Dynasty but was separated by three other kings from Menthesuphis, who ought to be her immediate predecessor according to Manetho.

The kings in Column IV, ll. 1–13 of the Canon form only one group, which reigned in all 187 years. In ll. 1–6 were written the kings of the Sixth Dynasty (see above, n. 5); the remaining lines must contain therefore the kings of the Eighth Dynasty.¹⁴

After the grand total of the years of this dynasty and of Dynasties I–VIII then follow the eighteen kings of the Heracleopolitan Dynasties IX–X. The Heracleopolitans as well as the first rulers of the Eleventh Dynasty are omitted from the Royal Tables of Abydos and of Saqqara, which apparently give only the names of the pharaohs of all Egypt. In the list of Saqqara king Phiops II, the last important ruler of the Old Kingdom, is immediately followed by the Eleventh Dynasty king *Nb-hpt-r^c* Menthotpe, the founder of the Middle Kingdom. But in Abydos eighteen additional kings (Nos. 39–56) are enumerated between Phiops II and Menthotpe. The first one of them is the above mentioned *Mr-n-r^c Df³-m-s³-f*, i.e., the

Menthesuphis of Manetho. The remaining seventeen kings must correspond, in all probability, to the Eighth Dynasty of the Greek historian.

In his reconstruction of the history of the First Intermediate Period¹⁵ Stock identified the kings Nos. 40–42 of Abydos with the three missing kings in Turin IV, 7–9 after Farina. He rightly considers these kings and their successors in Turin IV, 10–13 (*Nt-ḳrtj*, *Nfr-k³*, *Nfr*, and *Ḳb*) as Memphite rulers since the last one, *Ḳb*, is apparently to be identified with the king *Q³-k³-r^c Ḳbi* whose small pyramid at Saqqara, near that of Phiops II, was excavated by Jéquier.¹⁶ The remaining kings in the table of Abydos (Nos. 43–56) would be, according to Stock, Upper Egyptian local rulers from Abydos.¹⁷ This hypothesis, being a variant of an old idea of Sethe, who considered them to be kings of Coptos in Upper Egypt,¹⁸ is contradicted by the monumental evidence as well as by the tradition transmitted by Manetho and cannot be maintained.¹⁹ Apart from the occurrence of two prenomina containing the name of the god Min²⁰ it was based mainly on the fact that these names seemed to be preserved in the list of Abydos alone. Stock as well as Sethe supposed that there was a local tradition of the temple of Abydos. However, it is almost certain that all king-lists from the Ramesside Period originated ultimately in the tradition of the old residence Memphis as clearly shown by

¹⁰ *The Fragments of the Hieratic Papyrus at Turin* (London, 1851).

¹¹ Plate V and opposite p. 166.

¹² *Il papiro dei Re restaurato* (Roma, 1938).

¹³ Not lines 11–14 as enumerated by Farina, because one of his lines 7–10 does not exist in reality. Cf. my note in Stock, "Studia Aegyptiaca", II, 41, and more recently Gardiner's publication, see below, n. 25.

¹⁴ The Seventh Dynasty of Manetho (70 kings reigning for 70 days) apparently originated in a note on a period of trouble and is hardly to be found in any Egyptian king-list.

¹⁵ *Die erste Zwischenzeit Ägyptens* ("Studia Aegyptiaca," II [Roma, 1949]), 41.

¹⁶ *La pyramide d'Aba* (Le Caire, 1935).

¹⁷ *Op cit.*, pp. 32 ff.

¹⁸ *Gött. gel. Anz.*, 1912, pp. 705 ff., accepted by Kees (*Beitr. z. altäg. Provinzialverw.*, I, 108 f.; Scharff, *SBAW*, 1936, 8, pp. 40 f.; Drioton-Vandier, *L'Egypte* (1938), pp. 214 f., and others.

¹⁹ Refuted especially by Posener, *Bi. or.*, VIII (1951), 165 ff.

²⁰ *Nfr-k³-mnw*, miswritten *S-nfr-k³* by the Ramesside scribes. There is no reason, however, that this important god should not be venerated at that time also in Memphis like Hathor of Dendera and 'Anty of Hieracon.

Col. V

Col. IV

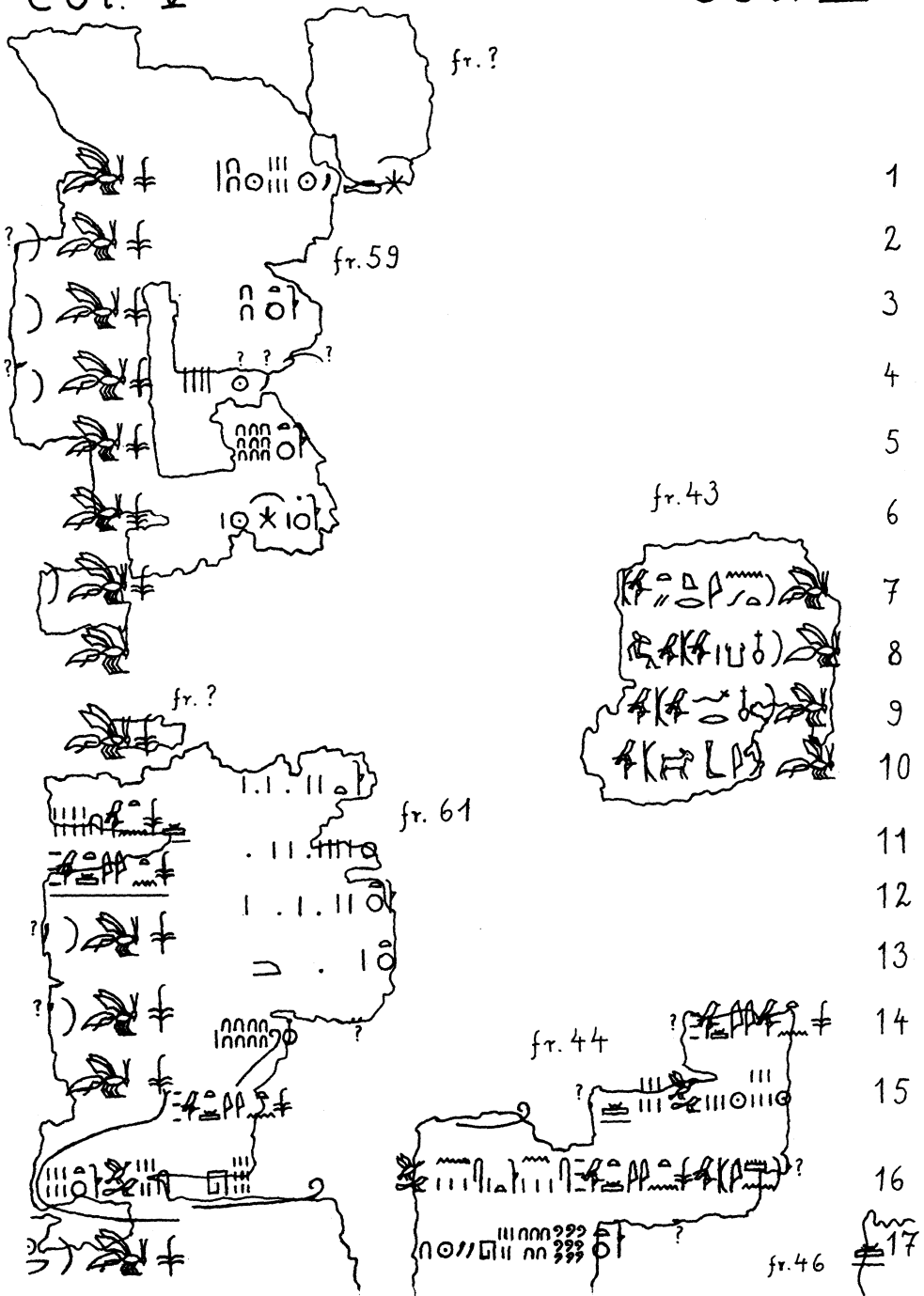


FIG. 1.—Cols. IV and V of the Royal Canon of Turin

<i>King-List of Abydos</i>	<i>Royal Canon of Turin</i>	<i>Manetho (after Africanus) Dynasty VI, 6 Memphite kings, 197 years</i>
34 Tt̄i	IV, 1 [Tt̄i, reigned . . . years.] 6 months, 21 days	Othoes 30 years
35 Wsr-k3-r ^c	2 [Wsr-k3-r ^c . . . years?]	Phios 53 years
36 Mry-r ^c	3 [Mry-r ^c] 20 years	Methusuphis 7 years
37 Mr-n-r ^c	4 [Mr-n-r ^c . . . years.] 4 months	Phiops 94 years
38 Nfr-k3-r ^c	5 [Nfr-k3-r ^c] 90 + x years	Menthesuphis 1 year
39 Mr-n-r ^c Df3-m-s3.f	6 [Mr-n-r ^c] 1 year, 1 month	Queen Nitocris 12 years
40 Ntri-k3-r ^c	7 Nt-igrty [. . . years. wsf 6 years]	<i>Dynasty VII, 70 Memphite kings, 70 days</i>
41 Mn-k3-r ^c		
42 Nfr-k3-r ^c		
43 Nfr-k3-r ^c Nbi		
44 Dd-k3-r ^c Šm3l		
45 Nfr-k3-r ^c Hndw		
46 Mr-n-hr		
47 Nfr-k3-mnw		
48 N-k3-r ^c		
49 Nfr-k3-r ^c Ttrl		
50 Nfr-k3-hr		
51 Nfr-k3-r ^c Ppy-snb	8 Nfr-k3-⟨r ^c ⟩ [. . .]	
52 Nfr-k3-mnw 'nw	9 Nfr-⟨k3-mnw⟩ šri [. . .]	
53 Q3w-k3-r ^c	10 'Ib 2 years, 1 month, 1 day	
54 Nfr-k3-w-r ^c	11 [Nfr-k3w-r ^c] 4 years, 2 months, 1 day	
55 Nfr-k3w-hr	12 [Nfr-k3w-hr] 2 years, 1 month, 1 day	
56 Nfr-ir-k3-r ^c	13 [Nfr-ir-k3-r ^c] 1½ year	

Dynasty VIII, 27 Memphite kings, 146 years


Helck.²¹ The difference between the lists of Abydos and Saqqara lies only in the less elaborate form of the latter, which omits not only the pretended Abydene kings (A Nos. 43–56) but also the immediate successors of Phiops II including king Menthesuphis whom Stock himself does not consider as an Abydene king.


As convincingly shown by Hayes,²² these kings resided at Memphis and must have been rulers of all Egypt whose administration was still acknowledged as far south as Coptos. The fact that they were weak rulers with ephemeral reigns and that the nomarchs at their time were nearly independent does not contradict this statement. There is no doubt, I think, that the seventeen Abydos kings Nos. 40–56 exactly correspond to the twenty-seven Memphite kings of Manetho's Eighth Dynasty.²³

Hayes recognized the very probable

identity of the  (A No.

53)²⁴ with the 

 from the above-mentioned

Saqqara pyramid and also with the king  of the Turin List

(IV, 13 after Farina). The three following rulers in the king-list of Abydos (Nos. 54–56: *Nfr-k3w-r^c*, *Nfr-k3w-hr*, and *Nfr-ir-k3-r^c*) are identified by him plausibly with the last three kings attested by the famous Decrees from Coptos, Horus *H^c-[b3w?]*, Horus *Ntri-b3w nsw-bit Nfr-k3w-hr s3-R^c K3-pw-ib*, and Horus *Dmd-ib-t3wy*.

²¹ *Untersuchungen zu Manetho u. den ägypt. Königslisten* ("Untersuchungen," XVIII [Berlin, 1956]).

²² *JEA*, XXXII (1946), 3 ff.

²³ The figure preserved by Africanus may be a miswriting or an intentional enlargement as in many other cases; cf. the sixteen Theban kings of the Eleventh Dynasty of Manetho against the six kings for the same dynasty in the Canon.

²⁴ For the restoration of the partly destroyed sign see Posener, *loc. cit.* in *Bi. or.*, VIII, 168, n. 5, after Parker.

Though these must have been rulers of the whole of Egypt they seemed to have been omitted from the Royal Canon (Farina's edition), which marks the end of Dynasty VIII and of the Old Kingdom immediately after king ³*Ib(i)* with the grand total.

Now Sir Alan Gardiner and J. Černý suggest in their long-awaited new edition of the Royal Canon²⁵ a shifting of the Fragment 43 to a position two lines above. In fact the fibers of the papyrus and also the position of the lines in Fragments 43 and 61 do not correspond very well in Farina's restoration. In the notes (p. 16) Gardiner remarks furthermore that "on historical grounds Nitocris ought . . . to come in the second place after Phiops II." The position given to the fragment in his Plate II does not agree with this statement, since Nitocris comes there in the third place after Phiops II. We cannot find, however, any difficulty in placing Fragment 43 in Column IV, ll. 7–10 instead of ll. 8–11 as suggested by Gardiner and Černý.²⁶

If this position is right, Nitocris becomes in the Canon an immediate successor of Menthesuphis and she would be the last ruler of the Sixth Dynasty in full agreement with Manetho. King ³*Ib(i)* moves then from l. 13 to l. 10, and his three successors in the Abydos king-list (*Nfr-k3w-r^c*, *Nfr-k3w-hr*, and *Nfr-ir-k3-r^c*, the kings known from the Coptos Decrees) would find their places in ll. 11–13. They would here be the last kings of the dynasty so that the agreement of the lists of Turin and Abydos is nearly perfect. The apparently incomplete names of the two predecessors of ³*Ib(i)* in the Canon, *Nfr-k3* and *Nfr*,²⁷ may be completed as *Nfr-k3-⟨r^c⟩* and *Nfr-⟨k3-mnw⟩*

²⁵ *The Royal Canon of Turin* (Oxford, 1959), Pl. II.

²⁶ This holds also for the recto.—At the last minute I see that Gardiner himself gives a position for Nitocris just after Menthesuphis as a possibility in his new book *Egypt of the Pharaohs* (Oxford, 1961).

²⁷ They cannot be correct prenomina without the name of a god.

respectively.²⁸ Thus Turin IV, 8–13 may well correspond to the Abydos kings Nos. 51–56.

While queen Nitocris is omitted from the List of Abydos the eleven kings A Nos. 40–50 seem to be absent from the Royal Canon. It is very probable that the scribe of the Canon omitted their names because of the extreme shortness of their reigns and that he entered the total of their years as

missing:²⁹ "missing 6 years."

The hieratic group for "missing," *wsf*, does not mean in the Canon a kingless period as hitherto supposed (Farina: "vacanze") but rather denotes the wanting (or the intentional omission) of one or more names (or figures).³⁰ This entry is found in the total of the dynasty where it is added separately (end of l. 16). The same remark must have been written therefore at a certain place within the dynasty where it is now lost. Since a separate line was not used for such entries it was probably entered behind the regnal years of the last king preceding the omission.³¹ This was certainly queen Nitocris, who cannot be separated from the kings of the Sixth Dynasty. Line 7 in Column IV of the Canon may be therefore restored perhaps as follows:

If we are right in the identification of the kings Turin IV, 8–13 with the kings Abydos Nos. 51–56 there is a remarkable concord of the two king-lists. Abydos ends the uninterrupted series of the Old Kingdom

with king *Nfr-îr-k3-r^c* (No. 56), omitting the dynasties of Heracleopolis and also the first kings of Dynasty XI. Turin writes just after the same king not only the total for Dynasties VI–VIII but also for the first eight dynasties. The beginning of the Ninth Dynasty did not cause a great change at Memphis, which apparently remained the center of administration.³² The fundamental difference which the later tradition saw between the Eighth and the Ninth Dynasties is shown by the great incision made by the Canon and by the omission of the Heracleopolitan kings in the Table of Abydos. There is only one plausible explanation of this difference: while the kings of the Eighth Dynasty, in spite of their small power, are still considered by the historical tradition as rulers of all Egypt (or at least as the only rulers of royal rank in their time) this is not the fact with the kings of the Ninth and Tenth Dynasties and the first rulers of the Eleventh Dynasty.

The correctness of this tradition is confirmed in the case of the Eighth Dynasty by the Decrees from Coptos. On the other hand the struggles of the Theban kings with Heracleopolis are well attested, as is likewise the fact that only the fifth king of the Eleventh Dynasty was able to reunite the kingdom of Egypt. During the years 2134 to about 2040 B.C., therefore, neither the Heracleopolitan nor the Theban kings ruled over the whole country. Furthermore, there is no evidence that the kings of Dynasties IX–X ever dominated the Thebais south of Abydos.³³ On the contrary, the report on the capture of Abydos by the father of King Merikarê^c shows that

³² At least some of the rulers of Dynasties IX–X were buried near Saqqara.

³³ The remark of Sayce (*The Academy*, 1892, II, 332), who saw the name of Akhtoy I (*Mr-ib-r^c*) on a rock near Aswan, was often cited but never verified. Even if his reading is correct and the name refers indeed to this king the occurrence of such a graffito would be, of course, no proof for an Upper Egyptian rule of Akhtoy.

²⁸ Cf. the incomplete writings *Nfr-k3* (for *Nfr-k3-r^c*) in Turin II, 24 and *Dd* (for *Dd-k3-r^c*) in III, 24.

²⁹ For a similar reconstruction see Helck, *op. cit.*, pp. 30 f.

³⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 14 f.; Goedicke, *JEA*, XLII (1956), 50 ff.; v. Beckerath, *ZÄS*, LXXXIV (1959), 84.

³¹ Cf., for example, the like remark in Column VI, l. 6.

in all probability the kings of Heracleopolis never reached a point farther to the south.³⁴

It must be pointed out here again that the length of the so-called First Intermediate Period is still overrated, and the date for the end of the Old Kingdom is much too high even in recent books on Egyptian history. The point is much debated, but at all events a date as early as 2280 B.C. for the end of the Sixth Dynasty is impossible in view of our present knowledge. It is still based on the idea of Meyer³⁵ that the Canon gives the amount of years elapsed from the beginning of the Ninth to the end of the Eleventh Dynasty as 242 years. The publications of the Canon by Farina (1938) and by Gardiner (1959), however, show the correct reading of this figure as 143 years and as the total of Dynasty XI only. The total for Dynasties IX–X, which is unfortunately lost in the Canon, cannot have been 200 years as Meyer supposed. The seventeen kings of the Eighth Dynasty who left some monumental traces (including the pyramid of *Ḥibī* and the Decrees from Coptos) did not reign more than a quarter of a century. The same may be true of most of the eighteen kings of the two Heracleopolitan dynasties of whom we do not know anything. Even the two or three kings who seem to have reigned a decade or more left but a few scanty traces. Thus the reign of Heracleopolis hardly lasted more than a century in all.

The same conclusion has been drawn already by Helck, who suggested a nearly contemporary beginning of the kingdoms of the Ninth Dynasty in the north and the Eleventh Dynasty in the south.³⁶ He was troubled, however, by the apparent lack of the three kings known by the Coptos Decrees (A Nos. 54–56) in Farina's publica-

tion of the Canon of Turin. This difficulty is now removed by the new position of Fragment 43. In fact the change from the Eighth to the Ninth Dynasty in the north seems to have caused the revolt of the south. The Heracleopolitan kings thus were never recognized in the whole country and they are omitted therefore from the king-list of Abydos. The year of the beginning of the Ninth as well as of the Eleventh Dynasty was at once the year of the end of the united Egyptian kingdom as established by Menes. It was considered therefore by the historical tradition of the Egyptians as the date of the end of the Old Kingdom, as is shown by the grand total which the Canon gives here.

Since the date of the Twelfth Dynasty is well fixed to 1991–1785 B.C.³⁷ and since the length of the Eleventh Dynasty is transmitted by the Royal Canon of Turin as being 143 years, we are able to fix the year of the beginning of the kingdoms of Heracleopolis (Dynasties IX–X) and Thebes (Dynasty XI) to 2134 B.C. This would be the minimal and definitive date for the end of the Old Kingdom and a fixed base for the chronology of the third millennium.³⁸ The uncertainty of the length of the Eighth Dynasty is counter-balanced by the preserved total (187 years) for Dynasties VI–VIII in the Royal Canon; of the preceding dynasties III, IV, and V the approximative length for most of the reigns is known.

We cannot find any serious objections either historically or archeologically against this definitive shortening of the First Intermediate Period. The genealogy

³⁷ Parker, *The Calendars of Ancient Egypt* ("SAOC," 26 [Chicago, 1950]), pp. 63 ff. (Excursus C).

³⁸ The addition of the 955 years given by the Royal Canon for Dynasties I–VIII would result in a date 3089 B.C. for the beginning of Egyptian history. This is not the place to discuss the problems connected with this figure. It should be noted, however, that it includes at least the reigns of some kings who never ruled the whole country. The true date for King Menes may be, therefore, about 3000 B.C.

³⁴ Pap. Petersburg 1116 A, recto, ll. 72–74.

³⁵ *Gesch. d. Altert.*, I, *Supplement 1925*, pp. 66–69.

³⁶ *Op. cit.*, pp. 82–83, n. 1.

of the nomarchs of the XVth Upper Egyptian nome (Hermopolites)³⁹ shows about 110 years as the minimal distance from the end of Dynasty VI to the end of the Heracleopolitan kingdom. This period may have been longer but certainly not very much. Prince 'Ankhtyfy of Mu'alla⁴⁰ passed his early years when Abydos was the residence of an "Overseer of Upper Egypt" (*imy-rꜥ šmꜥw*) who was still recognized by the nomarchs. This cannot have

³⁹ See especially Anthes, *Die Felsenschriften von Hatnub* ("Untersuchungen," IX, [Leipzig, 1928]), pp. 97 ff.; Stock, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-68.

⁴⁰ Cf. the publication of his tomb by Vandier (*Mo'alla. La tombe d'Ankhtifi et la tombe de Sébekhotep* [Le Caire, 1950]) with discussion of the historical questions.

⁴¹ On the history of this office see Kees, *Beiträge z. altägypt. Provinzialverwaltung* ("Nachr. Ges. d. Wiss. Göttingen" [1932]), pp. 85 ff.; Helek, *Ägyptol. Forsch.*, XVIII (1954), pp. 109 f., and in his book *Zur Verwaltung des Mittl. u. Neuen Reiches* (Leiden, 1958), pp. 10 f.

been in the time of the three last kings of the Eighth Dynasty since that office had by that time lost every real importance.⁴¹ Therefore 'Ankhtyfy must have been a youth during the latter part of the reign of Phiops II. His victorious fights in the area of the Theban nome would fall most probably in the much troubled first years of the Eighth Dynasty when the royal authority was at its worst. Yet a king *Nfr-kꜥ-rꜥ* (?) is mentioned in the inscriptions of 'Ankhtyfy, unfortunately in an obscure context. Finally, the career of this prince found apparently a premature end only a few years after the beginning of the Eleventh Dynasty, i.e., after 2134. The Theban kings of course could not tolerate a hostile prince just at the doors of their residence.

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