

**EGYPT**  
AND  
THE NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES  
BC 1000

By Samuel Sharpe

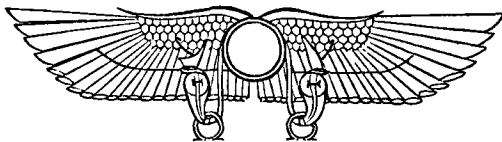
*Snow-covered mountains*

THE  
HISTORY OF EGYPT

FROM THE EARLIEST TIMES  
TILL THE CONQUEST BY THE ARABS  
A.D. 640.

By SAMUEL SHARPE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.  
VOL. I.



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## P R E F A C E.

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AMONG the histories of the ancient world those of the Jews, of Greece, and of Rome, will always hold the first place in value : that of the Jews because it contains the history of our religion ; those of Greece and Rome for the poets and historians, the almost perfect works of art, and the quantity of knowledge that those nations have left us, and for the share that they have had in forming our opinions and guiding our tastes even in the present day. After these three histories, that of Egypt may certainly claim the next place, from the influence which that remarkable country has had upon the philosophy and science of the world. Even now the great stream of civilisation, after flowing through ages of antiquity and fertilising the centuries through which it has passed, is in its present fulness still coloured with the Egyptian opinions, as the Nile reaches the Delta red with Ethiopian soil. Architecture and sculpture, the art of writing and the use of paper, mathematics, chemistry, medicine, indeed we might add legislation, and almost every art which flourishes under a settled form of government, either took its rise in Egypt or reached Europe through that country. Many of our superstitions, and some of our religious truths, are here first met with ; and nearly two hundred references to the Bible in these pages show

how much light Egypt and the Scriptures may throw one upon another.

Much of the early portion of Egypt's history had been lost and has latterly been regained; it had been hidden from us by the shade which time sooner or later throws over man's doings and we are now delighted to find that it can be read by the light of modern science. Such further knowledge of the world's childhood brings with it some of the experience of age. An addition to the beginning of ancient history, without making our race older, gives us a longer life to look back to. We can thus more justly judge of the progress in science, in art, and in morals, with which God has already rewarded man's industry; we can more safely look forward to further improvement as a reward to our continued industry. The study of the past helps faith to lay hold upon the future.

The older monuments of sculpture teach us the names of numerous kings of Thebes, of Memphis, and of the Phenician shepherds; and though there may be doubts as to the order in which these early dynasties are to be placed, yet they leave us in no doubt as to the high antiquity which must be granted to this earliest of nations. Greek history begins with the Trojan war, when Egyptian Thebes was already falling from its high rank among cities. Jewish history begins a little earlier with the flight of the Israelites from Egypt, when the Egyptian kings already boasted of a long line of ancestors. And even when the first faint Jewish tradition brings Abraham from Chaldæa and makes this father of the Hebrew nation lead his herds to drink of the waters of the Nile, Egypt was then a highly civilised country, the pyramids had been built near Memphis, the Egyptians had worked copper mines on Mount Sinai, and the obelisk of Heliopolis, with the other sculptured

monuments which he must have seen as he passed, still prove the high state of the arts at that time. After the time of Abraham the history may be traced with certainty through the reigns of Amunothph, Thothmosis, Rameses, and the other great Coptic kings, who for upwards of five hundred years made Thebes their capital, and usually held Lower Egypt as a province. It was during these reigns that Egypt surpassed every country of the known world in wealth and power, and was foremost in all the arts of civilisation, of commerce, and of agriculture. Moses was then educated in all the learning of the Egyptians; and though Upper Egypt was at that time little known to the Greeks, Homer speaks of the armies and wealth of Egyptian Thebes as proverbial. No Theban historians, it is true, have recorded their great deeds; but the buildings are themselves the deeds, and the sculptures on the walls show that the nation was conscious of their greatness while performing them. The massive temples and obelisks covered with hieroglyphics, and the colossal statues, which have already outlived three thousand years, prove the high civilisation of the kingdom, even before the Jews had become a people, before the Greeks had got an alphabet; and they are among the causes of the lively interest with which we trace its history in the following ages. They marked these buildings with a serious gravity wholly their own. We have ourselves no national style in architecture, but we borrow from each what to our judgment or feelings seems most suitable for its purpose. We copy the buildings of the Chinese or Arabs for a summer house in the garden, those of the Greeks for a theatre, those of the Romans for a bridge, and for a triumphal monument, those of the Italians for a palace, those of our northern forefathers for a place of worship, and we go back to

the early Egyptians for the models best suited for the solemnity of a tomb.

For about five hundred years more, beginning with Shishank the conqueror of Rehoboam, the kingdom was governed by kings of Lower Egypt, and the Thebaid fell to the rank of a province. The wars then carried on were chiefly in Syria, sometimes aimed at the conquest of Judæa and Samaria, and sometimes to save those kingdoms from becoming provinces of Babylon. The wealth and population of the country were as great or greater under these kings of Memphis and Sais, but the public spirit and virtue of the people were less; and much of that wealth which had before raised the great temples of Thebes was then spent in the hire of Greek mercenaries to surround a throne which native courage alone was no longer able to guard. The sovereigns were almost Greeks. It was then that Egypt was first open to Greek travellers, and the philosophers eagerly sought from the priests a knowledge of their famed science. The great names of Plato, who studied at Heliopolis, of Solon and Pythagoras, who had visited the Delta still earlier, and of many others of less note, prove how ready Greece then was to learn from Egypt.

During the next two hundred years, beginning with the conquest of the country by Cambyses, Egypt was mostly a province of Persia, and when not smarting under the tyranny of a foreign satrap was suffering as severely from its own half-successful attempts to regain its freedom. In these struggles between the Egyptians and their conquerors both parties trusted much to the courage of Greek mercenaries and allies; the Athenians were ranged on one side and the Spartans on the other; Persians and Egyptians had both placed the sword in the hands of the Greeks; and hence, when the power of

Macedonia rose over the rest of Greece, when the Greek mercenaries flocked to the standard of Alexander, he found little difficulty in adding Persia, and its tributary province Egypt, to the rest of his conquests.

For three hundred years after the Macedonian conquest Egypt was an independent Greek kingdom, and nearly as remarkable for wealth and power under Ptolemy and his descendants, as it had been under its native sovereigns, and that at a time respecting which the faint traditions of consular Rome do not deserve the name of history. It is not as the birthplace of art and science alone that Egypt now claims our attention. No sooner did Greece itself sink than Greek literature took refuge in Alexandria. Philosophy then became coloured with the mysticism of Egypt, and literature was waited on by its criticism. To the Alexandrian copiers and libraries we mainly owe our knowledge of the great Greek writers and our earliest manuscripts of the Bible; while whatever help we have received from grammarians and critics, whatever in history we have gained from chronology, in poetry from prosody, in geography from mathematics, in medicine from anatomy, was first taught in Alexandria. Its public library was the admiration of the world. But Alexandria may be pointed to as a warning that it is possible to cultivate the intellect without raising man's moral worth; and after a reign or two we find that every public virtue was wanting among its citizens, while vice and luxury rioted in the palace. Every succeeding Ptolemy seemed worse than his father; still Cleopatra, the last sovereign of that remarkable family, unable to quell the rebellion of her Alexandrian subjects, yielded up her person and her capital to each Roman general who in his turn seemed able to uphold her power.



For nearly seven centuries more, to the end of this history, Egypt was governed by the Romans, or, to speak more strictly, for three centuries and a half by Rome and for three centuries and a half by Constantinople, but always through the means of the Greek colonists in Alexandria. During most of these unhappy years, notwithstanding the introduction of christianity, both Greeks and Egyptians were sinking in everything that makes a nation great or a people happy. The ancient learning fell with paganism, while the superstition still lived to mix itself with the religion of Jesus. Frequent rebellions and the inroads of the Arabs added to the weakness and misery of the province.

After the rise of christianity, Alexandria no longer played that second part only in civilisation, nor furnished the handmaid sciences alone, but had its own schools in philosophy, and gave birth to sects in religion. In Alexandria took place that important union between Judaism and Platonism which should receive careful attention in the history of philosophy and of the human mind. Hence the Jewish scriptures became first known to the pagans, and the doctrine of one God was perhaps less unwillingly listened to by them in consequence of its being united to some of their own philosophical opinions. The pagans were beginning to drop their polytheism, as Platonism appeared in the writings of the Jews; and both may thereby have been at the same time better fitted for the truths of christianity. The later Platonists of Alexandria have perhaps hardly had justice done them by the moderns, either in regard to the improvement which they wrought in paganism, or the share which they have had in forming the present opinions of the world. Taking the doctrine of Plato as the foundation, borrowing something from the Jews and something from the other sects of pagans, they formed a philosophical

religion, which we may think of little worth when offered as the rival of christianity, but which we ought to admire as surpassing any other sect of paganism.

In Gnosticism we see another form of philosophy, an eastern mysticism, in which science was studied as a help to magic and divination; which had at the time, and no doubt still has, some share in moulding the opinions of Christians. It was common among the Jews at the time of the apostles; Paul censures it by name, and John indirectly. It was the parent, or perhaps the sister of Manicheism, and it has left its traces among several sects of Christians who seem to look for some other source for the origin of evil than the will of a benevolent Creator.

Among the three great families of christianity, the Greek, the Egyptian, and the Roman, the Egyptians often held the first place in importance. They were the first and chief corruptors of christianity; and the history of wide-spreading error is hardly less important than the history of truth. The Egyptians were usually followed by the Romans as their pupils. The Egyptians long held the Nicene Creed against the Greek and Syrian churches; and though the opinions of modern Europe are in the first case to be traced up to Rome, yet, if we would carry back our search to their original source in Palestine, we must in most cases pass through Alexandria.

When the seat of empire was removed from Rome to Constantinople, and Alexandria lost its power over Egypt, the difference of religion between the two countries was the cause of a growing difficulty to the government. The Greeks of Alexandria, like the protestants of Dublin, were of the same religion, politics, and blood as their rulers, and in a constant state of quarrel with their fellow-subjects. Sometimes an

emperor like Zeno healed the disputes by treating both parties with equal justice. At other times, as under Theodosius, the country was governed according to the wishes of the less enlightened majority, and the Arian Greeks of Alexandria lost that ascendancy which they claimed as their birthright. But more often the emperors tried to govern the Egyptians by means of the favoured class; they goaded the people to rebellion by appointing to the churches and bishopricks and civil offices men whom the people hated as heretics and aliens; and at last the Egyptians, with an equal want of wisdom, threw themselves into the arms of their Arab neighbours, in hopes of regaining the government of their own church.

Thus Egypt, a country once the greatest in the world, but now to be counted among the least, gives us as many examples of what to shun as what to copy. On the banks of the Nile race after race has marked the high points to which it reached by its inventions, its buildings, or its literature, and in its turn has fallen back again to vice and littleness. The ruined temples and now unmeaning pyramids lead us to inquire, why arts decay and empires crumble, why Heliopolis is no longer a seat of learning, and why the papyrus rush has ceased to grow in the Delta? They remind us that no wealth, no arts, no literature, can save a nation from ruin, unless it has the wish to check its own vices.

Thus also History amuses us while it teaches; it withdraws the mind from the cares of the present to live in the quiet of the past, where we hear of troubles without being made anxious, because the events that are to follow are already known.

Few of us would wish the thread of a story broken to be told where it disagrees with that of a former author, but it may

interest the reader of Gibbon to learn in what points the writer of these pages has ventured to differ from that great historian. It escaped Gibbon's accurate eye that, on the death of Aurelian, part at least of the Roman world was governed for several months in the name of his widow Severina;—compare page 235 of vol. ii. with Gibbon, chap. xii. He also omits the name of Vaballathus Athenodorus as a Roman emperor, who reigned for one year as Aurelian's colleague;—see page 233. He seems mistaken in believing with Dion Cassius, that when the quarrels broke out between the Jews and Pagans in several cities in the first century, the unhappy Jews were the assailants;—compare page 106 with Gibbon, chap. xvi. Again, he too hastily follows Procopius rather than Theophanes and Nonnosus at the end of his chapter xlii.; he thus confounds the embassy of Julianus in the reign of Justin, with that of Nonnosus in the reign of Justinian;—see pages 348 and 355. He makes a needless difficulty of Elagabalus, who reigned three years and nine months, that is, three years and parts of two others, dating his coins in his fifth year.

With respect to the following pages, the author would add that he has thought it better not to treat of the literature and religion separately from the political events, but to throw the whole into the form of annals. Literature always takes its tone from the events of the day, and changes with the state of society; so also of religion. Although the idolatrous sculptures on the walls remain unchanged, yet the opinions about them change from century to century; and it is as necessary to note the passing of time when giving an account of a people's religion as when speaking of its government. Ecclesiastical history is very unfaithfully written when disjoined from the political quarrels which accompany the change of opinions.

Again, he would remark that, from the scantiness of the materials, he has very often been unable to enlarge on an event as much as its importance seems to deserve. But he has in every case stated in the text or in the margin the works from which he has taken each piece of information, so that the inquiring reader may not only check his accuracy, but may at once see the sources in which further knowledge may be looked for.

He has to thank his learned friend, Dr. H. Jolowicz, of Koenigsberg, for the honour of having his History published in a German translation; and though he differs widely from the chronological opinions of his German annotators, yet he has been enabled to correct several mistakes which are pointed out in the Notes to that edition, Leipsig, 1857-8.

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## DESCRIPTION OF THE WOODCUTS IN VOL. I.

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- Fig. 2.—An Egyptian crossing the river on a raft made of two bundles of rushes. (Denon, pl 78.)
- Fig. 3.—The name of Osirtesen I. The characters in the first oval are perhaps, Ho-Ke-Ra, of which the sun Ra, though first in order, is pronounced last. Those in the second are, O, S, R, T, S, N, and spell the name that we here give to him, as the Greek authors usually call the Egyptian kings by the names in the second of the two ovals. The title over the first oval is *Sot-nout meaning king of Upper Egypt, king of Lower Egypt*. That over the second oval is *Se-ra, son of the Sun*.
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- Fig. 33.—The name of Amunothph I. The characters in the first oval are Ra-Seb, K, or Sebeka. Those in the second oval are A, M, N, O, Th, Ph, or Amunothph, *dedicated to Amun*. The harsh sound of this word is justified by our finding that the Greeks sometimes spelt it Amenophis and sometimes Amenothus. The position of the last two characters is reversed in the woodcut by a mistake of the artist.
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- Fig. 58.—A Column of a single papyrus-stalk and bud, of most unnaturally thick proportions. It is ornamented with bands as if it were a cluster of several stalks. (J. Bonomi.)
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