

**THEBES** (modern Luxor) ancient Greek name for the Upper Egyptian town of Waset (or Nut) and, from the end of the Old Kingdom, the main city of the fourth Upper Egyptian nome (25°43' N, 32°38' E). Thebes became the capital of Egypt during parts of the eleventh dynasty and during the New Kingdom. In the Greek sources (e.g., Homer's *Odyssey*), the Boeotian and the Egyptian Thebes were differentiated by the epithets *heptapyloios* ("seven-gated") and *hekatompyloi* ("hundred-gated"), respectively. *Hekatompyloi* may have referred to either the numerous doorways (pylons) in the temples on the eastern bank of the Nile River or to the tomb entrances on the western bank of the Nile. The site of Thebes includes areas on both sides of the Nile: On the eastern bank, the city of Waset had the two main temples of Upper Egypt during the New Kingdom, the temple of Karnak in the north and the temple of Luxor in the south; on the western bank, large private and royal cemeteries, as well as numerous temple

complexes, extended over an area of more than 4 kilometers (2.4 miles) in length and 0.5–1 kilometer (about a quarter to a half mile) in width. The great number of monuments, many exceptionally well preserved, make the Theban area the largest and most important archaeological site in Egypt.

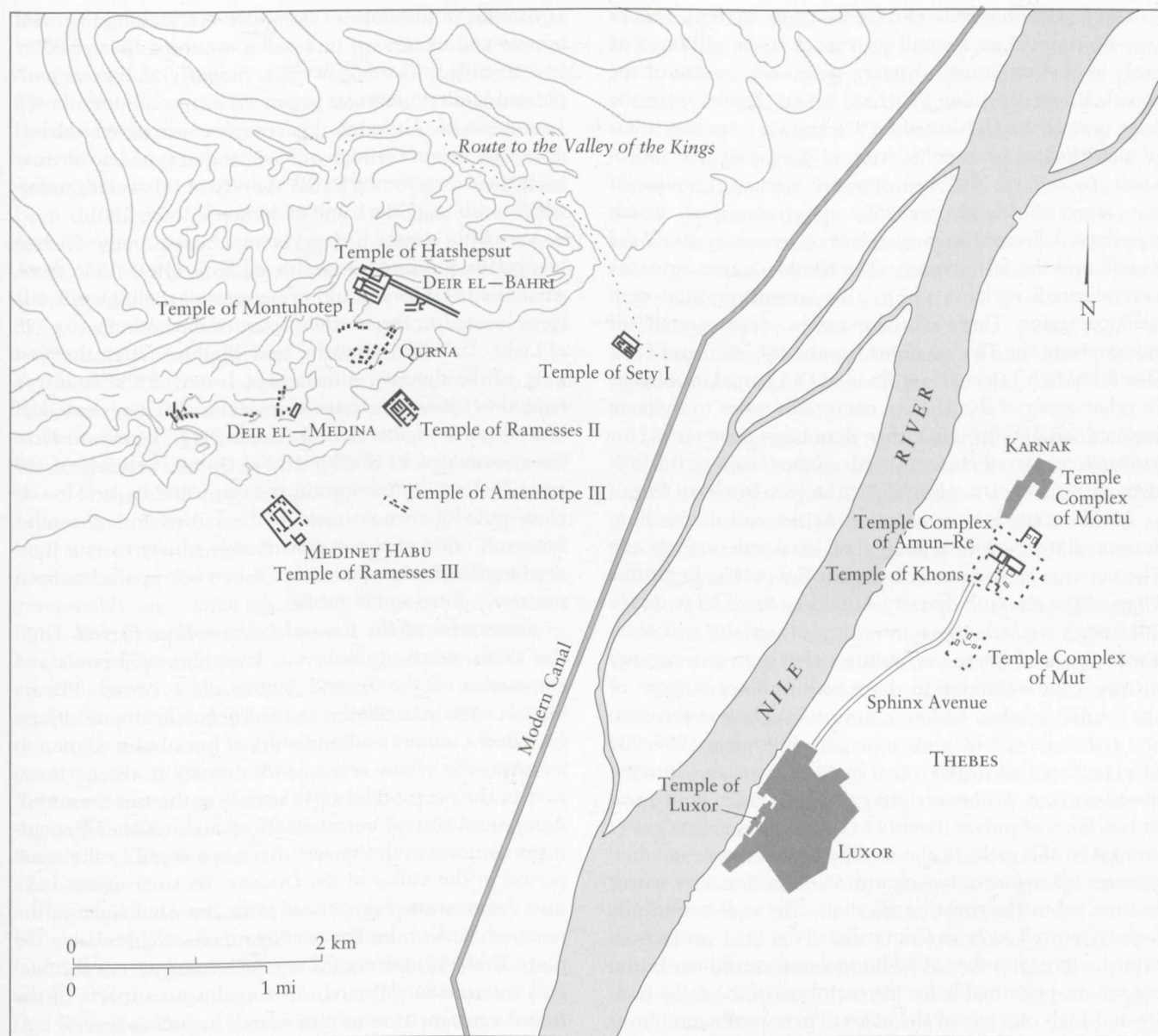
**Eastern Bank of the Nile.** A discussion of the principal archaeological features follows.

**The temple of Karnak.** Archaeologically, the eastern bank of Thebes is dominated by the gigantic temple complex of Karnak, the home of Egypt's main god Amun-Re from the time of the Middle Kingdom onward. The earliest known parts of the temple have been dated to the first half of the eleventh dynasty, when a presumably modest temple, or a chapel, for the god Amun was erected by King Antef II. The temple was substantially expanded in the twelfth dynasty, during the reign of Senwosret I. The temple, however, seems to have remained in this state for almost four hundred years. From the eighteenth dynasty until the Roman period, Karnak was a place of continuous building activity, but of varying intensity.

**The temple of Luxor.** The main part of the temple of Luxor was founded by Amenhotpe III (r. 1410–1372 BCE). An earlier triple shrine (bark-station), built by Queen Hatshepsut and Thutmose III (r. 1502–1452 BCE) north of the first pylon, remained in use at later times; then in the nineteenth dynasty, Ramesses II added an open court to the north of the existing Amenhotpe III building. Since the Ramessid addition respected the orientation of the axis of the earlier shrine, this caused a widening angle of orientation and therefore a significant deviation for the central axis of the temple complex. During New Kingdom times, the Luxor temple was one of the most important centers for, and a starting point of, numerous feasts, festivals, and ceremonies (e.g., the Valley and the Opet Festivals). The main temple was connected with the temples of Karnak and Mut by a paved avenue of sphinxes.

In 1989, the Egyptian Antiquities Organization discovered a major cache in the forecourt of the Amenhotpe III temple. This deposit, in the western part of the court, contained several statues of New Kingdom and later date gods and kings. All were in pristine condition, and they are now on permanent display in the Luxor Museum.

**The ancient city.** Little is known about life in the ancient metropolis of Thebes, although it must have been one of the largest cities of New Kingdom Egypt, with an estimated population of forty thousand to fifty thousand. The center of the city during New Kingdom and later times assumedly stretched between the two major temples of Karnak and Luxor, probably on both sides of the avenue of sphinxes that connected them. In the mid-1960s, an excavation by the Egyptian Antiquities Organization in the small suburb of Hod Abu el-Gud (300 me-

THEBES. *Plan of Thebes.*

ters/about 1,000 feet south of the Karnak enclosure wall) revealed part of a late New Kingdom town site, with mud-brick houses of modest size. If similar to other major cities of the New Kingdom—Tell el-Amarna, Malqata, and Deir el-Ballas—it is expected that royal palaces and large private houses also existed in the center of ancient Thebes, an area now almost entirely covered by modern-day Luxor.

Excavations by the Akhenaten Temple Project have revealed an extensive domestic quarter of Old Kingdom date that extends hundreds of meters east of the present Karnak *temenos*. To the southeast of the *temenos*, an ex-

tensive quarter of villas was uncovered that dated from the Ramessid Period, and belonged, according to doorpost inscriptions, to officials of the treasury. Late period Demotic texts referred to several districts, such as “the north of the City” and “House of the Cow”; northeast of the *temenos*, excavation has uncovered a sector of town houses, that date from c.690 to 340 BCE. A fluctuation in Thebe’s fortunes was suggested by the wholesale abandonment of vast tracts of housing at the close of the twentieth dynasty and again after 343 BCE.

**Western Bank of the Nile.** A discussion of the principal archaeological features follows.

**Old Kingdom tombs.** During the Old Kingdom, Thebes was no more than a small provincial town, although as early as the late fourth dynasty, it was the capital of the fourth Upper Egyptian (Theban) nome. Tombs from the later part of the Old Kingdom are known from two areas of the Theban necropolis: from el-Tarif and from Khokhah. In el-Tarif, the area opposite Karnak, remains of two large mud-brick *mastabas* were unearthed, which may have belonged to local rulers or to nomarchs of the fourth and the fifth dynasty. The Khokhah area contains several small rock-cut tombs that were decorated with wall paintings. Three of these tombs were created for nomarchs of the Theban nome (tombs 186, 405, and 413). [See Khokhah.] Occasional finds of Old Kingdom objects in other areas of the Theban necropolis seem to indicate isolated (shaft?) burials rather than large cemeteries, for example, scattered pottery sherds of the fourth or the fifth dynasty from the Dra Abul Naga area. [See Dra Abul Naga.]

**Middle Kingdom cemeteries.** At the end of the First Intermediate Period, a family of local rulers from the Theban area gained power in Upper Egypt. The first three kings of the eleventh dynasty, Antef I to Antef III (r. 2134–2068 BCE), erected large tomb complexes in the area of el-Tarif. Each of these *saff*-tombs (the Arabic term *saff* means “row,” referring to the rows of pillars in front of the tombs’ façades) had an entrance building at the eastern end, followed by a gigantic 250–300 meter (750–900 foot) rectangular, sunken open court that was dug into the desert surface. At the western end of this open court, one or two rows of pillars (twenty to twenty-four pillars) were cut out of the rock. In the middle of the façade, a small passage led to one or two chambers of modest size, which in turn led to the royal burial shaft. The wall behind the façade, as well as both side walls of the long court, contained a large number of additional and subsidiary burial chambers, presumably for the members of the royal family and high officials of the court. These tomb complexes seem to have been undecorated, with the exception of the entrance buildings on the east, where, in the tomb of Antef II (died 2068 BCE), the famous Dog Stela was found. Other members of the court and some officials of the local administration erected their own private *saff*-tombs, of considerably smaller scale, in the vicinity of their ruler’s tomb complex.

After the reunification of the country, Nebhepetre Montuhotep I (r. 2061–2011 BCE) moved the royal burial place to the valley of Deir el-Bahri, where he erected his huge tomb and temple complex. Although not a pyramid, the architectural layout of this complex clearly contained elements of the earlier Old Kingdom pyramid complexes—namely, a valley temple, at the edge of the cultivation, with a long causeway that led to the temple building. Courtiers and high officials of the time excavated their

*saff*-tombs in the slope of the valley overlooking the royal temple and causeway. In a valley south of Deir el-Bahri (the so-called “Third Valley”), a similarly ambitious temple and tomb project was begun under one of Montuhotep I’s successors. Although this complex was never finished or used, some of the high officials at that time had already built their own tombs in the vicinity of this ruler’s unfinished tomb (e.g., the tomb of Meketra, tomb 280).

Very little is known about private burials in the Theban necropolis during the twelfth dynasty (1991–1786 BCE), since the royal tombs and cemeteries of the high officials were located in the northern part of the country (e.g., in el-Lisht, Dahshur, Hawara, and Illahun), after the first king of the dynasty, Amenemhet I, moved the country’s capital to Itjtawy (perhaps today’s el-Lisht). Only one decorated tomb of this period (tomb 60) is known to have been excavated in Sheikh Abd el-Qurna. Officials of the local Theban administration and some middle- and lower-class individuals continued to be buried in *saff*-tombs; however, none of the approximately ninety to one hundred tombs of this type in the Theban necropolis has been positively dated to the twelfth dynasty.

**Cemeteries of the Second Intermediate Period.** Until the 1980s, relatively little was known about burials and cemeteries of the Second Intermediate Period. Private burials were located all over the Theban necropolis: these included a unique and undisturbed burial of a woman in a *rishi*-coffin of the seventeenth dynasty in the northern part of the necropolis; mass burials at the eastern end of Asasif; and several burial shafts of high officials (including a princess and a vizier) that were dated to the same period in the Valley of the Queens. Yet excavations have also demonstrated that the area of Dra Abul Naga in the northern part of the Theban Necropolis was probably the main Theban cemetery during the second part of the Second Intermediate Period. Also in this area, parts of the burial equipment were discovered, including several coffins, of kings of the seventeenth dynasty. Therefore, the Dra Abul Naga region was, almost certainly, the location of the seventeenth dynasty royal burials, although none of the tombs has yet been positively identified.

**New Kingdom cemeteries and mortuary temples.** Changes in theological conceptions at the end of the Second Intermediate Period and during the first decades of the eighteenth dynasty also resulted in a new understanding of royal and private funerary architecture. The most visible result of this new architecture was the deliberate separation of the royal tomb from the temple for the funerary cult of the deceased king. The age-old practice of an architectural unity for the royal burial place and the place for the royal funerary cult, as realized in the sophisticated pyramid complexes of the Old and Middle Kingdoms, no longer existed. With only a few exceptions,

throughout the New Kingdom, the tombs of the kings were placed in a remote valley in the mountains west of Thebes, which is known today as the Valley of the Kings. Their cult places, the mortuary temples, were erected at the border between the desert and the cultivated area, with no immediate connection to the tombs. Although Amenhotpe I (r. 1545–1525 BCE) is credited for having been the founder of the Valley of the Kings (and, therefore, for the separation of tomb and temple), there seem to be neither traces of his mortuary temple nor those of his immediate successors, Thutmose I and Thutmose II. The small structures usually attributed to those kings were, most probably, erected posthumously.

The first fully developed mortuary temple of the New Kingdom was that of Queen Hatshepsut (died 1482 BCE) at Deir el-Bahri. Architecturally, this unique temple combines elements of the nearby temple of Montuhotep I with those of the earlier royal *saff*-tombs of el-Tarif. For the following hundred and fifty years, virtually every king built a mortuary temple for his funerary cult. The most impressive was the temple of Amenhotpe III, which was presumably one of the largest buildings on the western bank; The Colossi of Memnon once flanked the entrance to this temple building and are now the only surviving, standing parts of the temple. For unknown reasons, the temple was dismantled during the New Kingdom and, today, little more than the foundation remains. In recent years, the Swiss Institute, Cairo, discovered a number of decorated limestone (calcite) blocks from a structure of the temple of Amenhotpe III that were being used as foundation blocks in the mortuary temple of Merenptah (died 1226 BCE).

The classical form of the New Kingdom mortuary temple on the Nile's western bank is represented by the nineteenth dynasty temples of Sety I, Ramesses II (the Ramesseum) and the twentieth dynasty temple of Ramesses III (Medinet Habu), the last being the best preserved. [See Sety I; Ramesses II; Ramesses III.] The political and economic crises at the end of the twentieth dynasty prevented the later Ramessid kings from erecting large temple complexes in the Theban area. The last known mortuary temple is that of Ramesses IV, located at the eastern end of Asasif; however, this ambitious building project was never finished. [See Asasif.]

For over four hundred years, the Valley of the Kings was the last resting place of the New Kingdom rulers. Which king of the early eighteenth dynasty was first to have a tomb there is still undetermined. The earliest positively identified eighteenth dynasty royal tombs are those of Thutmose III (tomb 34, died 1452 BCE) and Hatshepsut (tomb 20, died 1482 BCE). Similar uncertainty exists about the burial places of other female members of the royal family during the eighteenth dynasty. Although a number

of burial pits in remote areas of the Theban hills (e.g., the Valley of the Monkeys in the southern part of the necropolis) are known to have contained burials of royal princesses, no tombs there for the queens (except, perhaps, for the tomb of Queen Ahmose-Nefertari in Dra Abul Naga) or the princes have yet been identified. During Ramessid times, the Valley of the Kings was the only royal burial ground in Egypt; all the kings of this period are known to have built their own tombs there or usurped already existing tombs (the only "missing" royal tomb may be that of Ramesses VIII, if this king ever existed). A number of royal princes were also buried in the Valley of the Kings, whereas some of the queens and other princes of Ramessid times were buried in the Valley of the Queens.

The new conception of royal burials had an immediate impact on the location and general layout of nonroyal tombs. No longer could a high courtier or official have his private tomb erected in the vicinity of his king's tomb, as was the custom in the Old and Middle Kingdoms. The resulting, entirely new, conception of the private tomb led to the T-shaped basic form for private New Kingdom tombs at Thebes. From the beginning of the eighteenth dynasty and until the end of the twentieth dynasty, several hundred private tombs were cut out of the limestone hills and plains in various locations on the western bank of the Nile. The most important of them are the New Kingdom private cemeteries of Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, Khokhah, Dra Abul Naga, and the necropolis of the royal workmen in Deir el-Medina.

**Later cemeteries.** From the end of the New Kingdom to the twenty-fifth and the twenty-sixth dynasty, no substantial royal or private tombs are known on the western bank of the Nile at Thebes. The royal burial grounds were moved to other places outside Thebes (e.g., Tanis); officials of the Theban administration and the priests preferred to be buried in mass burials (e.g., the caches of the priests of Amun and Montu in Deir el-Bahri). All over the Theban necropolis, however, older tomb structures were extensively reused, often without disturbing or removing the original burials. During the twenty-fifth and the twenty-sixth dynasty, a number of exceptionally large tomb structures were erected in Thebes, in the Asasif (e.g. Harwa, tomb 37; Montuemhat, tomb 34; Pedamenophis, tomb 33; and Ibj, tomb 36); their owners belonged to the priestly and administrative elite of the theocracy of Amun in Thebes.

**Other monuments.** On the highest elevation of the western bank of Thebes, so-called Thoth Hill, in the northernmost part of the necropolis, there are substantial remains of a Middle Kingdom temple structure that, in its present form, was erected by Montuhotep II (r. 2011–2000 BCE) and presumably dedicated to the god Thoth. The re-

mains consist of a massive mud-brick enclosure wall and an inner tripartite sanctuary. The entrance of the sanctuary was flanked by limestone jambs, decorated with sunken relief that mentions the royal titles and names of the king. Excavations by a Hungarian expedition have revealed foundation deposits at all four corners of the temple, as well as an earlier structure, below the Middle Kingdom level, which may be dated to the Old Kingdom.

Between the temples of Amenhotpe III and that of Ramesses III (Medinet Habu) are the scanty remains of a temple structure that, from the layout and ground plan, resembles the architecture of royal mortuary temples. It was erected by and probably used for the cult of the high Theban official—Amenhotep, son of Hapu—who was a “scribe of recruits” and an “overseer of works” during the reign of Amenhotpe III and who was credited with erecting the famous Colossi of Memnon of Amenhotpe III. [See Amenhotep, Son of Hapu.]

Halfway between the laborers' settlement of Deir el-Medina and the Valley of the Queens is a small rock-cut sanctuary, with several chapels that were dedicated to the god Ptah and the local Theban goddess Meretseger. Although royal stelae and inscriptions are known from the sanctuary, it was mainly used by the inhabitants of Deir el-Medina for the worship of the goddess, one of the patron deities of the village during the Ramessid period.

Approximately 2 kilometers (1 mile) south of the temple of Medinet Habu, and outside the borders of the Theban necropolis, is a small, unfinished temple that was founded in Roman times and dedicated to the worship of the goddess Isis. Only the propylon, the entrance to the main temple, and the inner sanctuary are decorated with raised relief; the outside and most of the inner walls were left plain.

[See also Asasif; Deir el-Bahri; Deir el-Medina; Dra Abul Naga; Karnak; Khokhah; Luxor; Mut Precinct; Theban Necropolis; Tombs; Valley of the Kings; and Valley of the Queens.]

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DANIEL C. POLZ