

Yasmin El-Shazly:

I am very pleased to have with me today Dr. Stephen Harvey who will be talking to us about kingship from the Egyptian Middle Kingdom until the early New Kingdom. Since 1993 Dr. Harvey has been director of the Ahmose and Tetisheri project at Abydos in southern Egypt. He received his PhD in Egyptian archaeology in 1998 from the University of Pennsylvania and his BA in archaeological studies from Yale University in 1987. In addition to his extensive fieldwork at Abydos, Dr. Harvey has worked in Egypt at Giza and Memphis, as well as on archaeological projects in the United States, Syria and Turkey. Dr. Harvey has held teaching and curatorial positions at a number of leading Egyptological institutions, such as the University of Chicago, the University of Memphis and the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, Maryland. Dr. Harvey has appeared in numerous international television programs about ancient Egypt and has led many tours Egypt over the last 20 years. Thank you for accepting our invitation Dr. Harvey.

Steve Harvey:

Well, thank you, Dr. Yasmin.

ElShazly:

The end of the sixth dynasty is characterized by the decline of the state, leading to a period of decentralization, fragmentation, and weakness known as the First Intermediate Period, which lasts from roughly 2181 to 2014 BCE. At the end of this period, Egypt is reunited under the Theban king Montuhotep thus ushering in what is known as the Middle Kingdom. What lessons did the kings of the Middle Kingdom learn from the First Intermediate Period? And what changes did they make to ensure that this would not happen again?

Harvey:

That's a really interesting question. And you know, the First off, I just want to say that when you're beginning in Egyptology and or you don't know that much about ancient Egypt, and you just hear the words, Old Kingdom, Middle Kingdom, New Kingdom, it sounds flat, it sounds all kind of just like a repeat, one error repeating to the next, and that then all you'd need to really know are the dates right, that the Middle Kingdom begins around 2000 BC, and so on. But we know really, in fact, that that is far from the case, there's a different flavor of the Old Kingdom to the Middle Kingdom to the New Kingdom. And also, Egypt wasn't really conceived of in the same way. So just to repeat, for those who aren't familiar, what happens at the end of the Old Kingdom really, is that there's too long of a reign of the last ruler of the sixth dynasty Pepi . And he rules really, in fact, longer than almost any known monarch on Earth, Queen Elizabeth is coming up quickly upon his title to that Queen Elizabeth II that is. And what happens is that Egypt begins to lose that monumental, literally monumental and also monumental control of the pharaoh over all of the country. And what we see in the first Intermediate Period is the fragmentation of the country into different states, we could call them regions that are competing with one another. So instead of looking at ancient Egyptian history as just monolithic, you know, Old Kingdom, the Middle Kingdom, and New kingdom. What I'm interested in and I think a lot of us are interested in is trying to see the peaks and the valleys and understand the different. Let's say it's like a car different speeds that Egypt goes at. The First Intermediate Period is completely different in character because suddenly, instead of the image of the single great Pharaoh ruling over the entire country from Mediterranean down to the borders with Nubia, in the south, you have fragmentation, and you have local kinglets Mini kings who are competing with one another. And this means that anyone It feels like can sort of say they are a king. By the time of the Middle Kingdom, and the emergence of a ruler called Mentuhotep II at Luxor ancient Thebes; Waset as it was called in Egypt. In the 11th dynasty, there's an attempt to quash all of this reunify the country, in particular go after the rulers in the north that the place called Heracleopolis, and then reunify Egypt. But when Egypt is reunified in what we call the Middle Kingdom, it's reunified from the point of view of the South, from the point of view of the southerners with the art style, culture, way of thinking of the South. And that is very different than

the traditional culture based in the north in ancient Memphis, which we see reflected in the monuments at Giza, Dahshur, Meidum, the pyramids of the Old Kingdom. So, it's a startling change. And we start to see things run differently. The Middle Kingdom rulers, though, after a period of just consolidating their power from Thebes, go north, they decide to start building pyramids, again, in the traditional pyramid fields. They also, though, give a lot of power to these regional officials. And the regional officials throughout the country, are actually given a startling amount of power for quite a while and build huge tombs that almost compete with the pharaohs tombs for symbolic power and expression. So, we see a very interesting set of things happening in the Middle Kingdom that allow us to ask a lot of questions. And we also see, and I know we're going to talk about this later, a different image of the pharaoh started to emerge in the Middle Kingdom, an image that we couldn't even imagine an Old Kingdom ruler having. So different speeds, different flavors, different regional relationships, and in the Middle Kingdom, a different relationship to the outside world and to conquering other regions and maintaining control over the whole population, including outside of Egypt's borders. So that was a big answer.

EI-Shazly:

Well, very informative. I'm glad you brought up the different image of the king, because that's what I will ask you about right now. So how did the kings of the Middle Kingdom have themselves represented in art and literature? And how is this different from how the Old Kingdom kings represented themselves?

Harvey:

Well, it's a completely fascinating subject. And it's one that we could have an entire podcast about in itself. If we look at statues of the Old Kingdom rulers, we see youthfulness, both in the bodies which Mark Lehner, you know, just gave a talk for ARCE the other day, and he said they look like adolescent Olympic athletes. And he's absolutely right. You know, it's the perfect...

EI-Shazly:

I heard that.

Harvey:

It's a perfect way to describe the way that the Old Kingdom rulers look, I've always said they look like a buff, you know, 20-year-old, they don't look and the women too. They don't look their age. They don't look human. In a sense, They're superhuman, and the faces reflect the confidence. They're strong. They're unlined in many ways, or if there's a wrinkle, it's just a sort of a, you know, a kind of a serious look to them. When we come to the Middle Kingdom, we see artistic strategies evolving, not right at the beginning, but over time that are completely different. And we have to ask why, but just to cut to the chase, in the 12th dynasty, and especially in the later 12th dynasty, we see a change from the pharaoh as a youthful individual with just absolute power and even kind of a smile. We think of say if you are sitting in front of your computer and you can look up the images of Amenhotep I and Senusert I, just kind of simple happy faces. But by the end of the 12th dynasty, by the time of Amenhotep III and Senusert III, these great Pharaohs who had enormous power, including building fortresses throughout all of Nubia, Sudan to control the southern part of the country. We see worry, we see concern we see drooping baggy eyes and wrinkly faces not wrinkled with extreme old age but with what scholars in the past had concern, called concern or worry. Interestingly, and it's great that you brought up the literature too. In the literature we see reflected in this time in the Middle Kingdom literature, a totally new breeze blowing through. And the breeze is personal. It's emotional. And it's even reflecting on the uncertainty of life. One of the pieces that I want to just mention is a very moving poem that when I first read it as a student, I was amazed by, which sometimes gets called a man who's tired of life or other times is a dispute of a man with his soul, his ba.

EI-Shazly:

Yeah, that's one of my favorites.

Harvey:

It's incredible, because it is basically a man is considering let's just put it frankly, he's considering suicide. And he's saying death is in front of me today. And you know, some of it, I'm just going to read Richard Parkinson's translation of it, they have sitting in front of me just a few phrases. *Death is to me today, like a man's longing to see home, having spent many years in captivity. Death is to me like the smell of flowers like sitting on the shore of drunkenness. Death is to me today like a well-trodden path, like a man's coming home from an expedition.* So, it's very beautiful, but also distressing. There is a distressing element in culture of the Middle Kingdom. Where is the stress coming from? Well, one thing you could say is that it's maybe not just stress, it's also extreme beauty. It's also extreme emergence of the heart as Jan Assman, the great scholar of Egyptian intellectual life has called it. But one thing that's happening too, is that there's political stress, we know that some of the stories of this time the great epic tale of Sinuhe, who leaves Egypt, after hearing that the pharaohs been assassinated, and runs off to the Levant, to make a new life for himself. This possibly reflects the assassination of the Pharaoh Amenemhet I and what is amazing to think, is that some of these all powerful God kings, that the pharaohs were could, and we know what happened in ancient Egypt come under threat from other political forces, other individuals who wanted to take their lives and take political control, and that the Egyptians at this time, at least in the literate 1%, you know, the small percentage of men and maybe some women who could read and write, that these people were aware that the pharaoh could be under threat, and that he could be mortal, which is extraordinary for a culture built around the idea that the pharaoh is this God King born from a partly human and partly divine origin, right, his mother, in theory is human. And then she's visited by a God who literally impregnates his mother and makes him into this amalgam of God King. So, to then talk about the pharaoh as a person in this way, and then to turn the art around from this mask, like sort of eternal youthful buff dude to become this vulnerable, older person. Now, one thing that we can say about that, though, is it's not just a matter of showing vulnerability. So, scholars like Roland Tefnin have pointed out that when the eyes are heavy and lidded, and hooded, rather, that this may be shows that he's watching out for the kingdom, that the enormous

ears and one thing we can laugh about this that the late 12th dynasty Pharaohs have just ridiculously Dumbo, like huge ears,

EI-Shazly:

Everybody comments about that.

Harvey:

But scholars back in the 60s pointed out well maybe that's because he's hearing the people and hearing their pleas and their concerns. So, this term emerged to call these images of the pharaoh that they were reflecting him as the careworn Shepherd of his flock. I love that term, careworn, that is to say worn down with concern for his people. Not something that we think of Khufu, right? When we think of, you know, egging on 30,000 Egyptians to come and build his great pyramid. And same with Khafre and so on these Old Kingdom classic fourth dynasty rulers who are or probably literally and figuratively bankrupting the country for their just ridiculously huge building projects that have lasted the test of time, right. They are still as they ever were. Yeah. But at what cost? Right? So the Old Kingdom raises the question of cost to the people of the extent maybe of the extremity of royal power, but also its limitations. And then, you know, with the actual failure of the pharaoh to hold the country together in the Old Kingdom at the end of the Old Kingdom, and then the dissolution of exactly what Egypt was, it was always the two lands Upper and Lower Egypt since, let's say, 3200 BC, it had been the unified state. What happens when you don't have a unified state anymore? Right around 2100 or 2200 BC? How do you call yourself a pharaoh? What does it mean to be a pharaoh? And these are questions that I think get examined in the Middle Kingdom and we see something interesting, which is a rise that the pharaohs intentionally produce in control over the people and building more temples to the gods, instead of just sort of God King temples to themselves. And I'm just threading a bunch of things together that we can examine more as you like.

EI-Shazly:

That's great. So, the king during the Middle Kingdom was human, more human than the kings of the Old Kingdom. And but they really cared for their people or that's how they want it to appear.

Harvey:

I mean, you know, the irony is, of course, and this is an interesting factor too. While the Early Middle Kingdom kings at Thebes, like Mentuhotep II who built this wonderful, innovative, interesting, complex at Deir el Bahari that was creative and used elements of the local architecture and elements may be of the architecture of the North. I mean, all this was creative, it was innovative, it was different. It must have tasted, smelled, and felt different, right. So, if you went into the royal court in the, let's say, the 11th dynasty, the beginning of the Middle Kingdom, it must have been really weird. If you were a northerner, you would think I don't even really know where I am. These people have a different, I'm assuming that like in modern Egypt, people had a different dialect. And we have good reason for thinking that or at least a different accent. They were Sa'idi they were southerners, even back then, and so they express their culture, their Sa'idi their Southern culture very aggressively at the beginning, but by the next Pharaoh or two, we see something amazing, which is they go back north, and they start a new city, Seizing of the Two Lands, Itj tawy They establish the city as a new capital near the Faiyum. And they go back, and they build carbon copy pyramids. And when I say carbon copy pyramids, scholars like Dieter Arnold, from the Metropolitan Museum, have established that they literally went in and measured each and every room and copied it, they must have been, in a way, the first archaeologists we know about in Egypt now, in fact, not the last archaeologists, because in the New Kingdom, a royal figure like Khamewase, the son of Ramses the great was famously kind of an archaeologist and went back and dug up sites and studied them and restored them. So, he was more of a conservator restorer. But in the Middle Kingdom, the 12th dynasty kings literally copied these older monuments, and that tells us something which is that they're not, they're not entirely concerned with a new image of themselves, they do have this attention to tradition, they want to be regarded as old

school, literally old school Pharaohs, of the Old Kingdom. And in making copies of these pyramids of the Sixth Dynasty in particular, even down to the same height, 100 cubits 52 meters high 150 feet, which is the standard size of the pyramid at that time, they are saying we are in fact, very connected to the Old Kingdom. And something I think is interesting that's emerged through research in the past number of years. Especially the excavations in the pyramid temple and pyramid site of Senusert III at the Dahshur, the pharaoh is innovating based on Old Kingdom models. And some of these go back even to the Third Dynasty to Zoser's Step Pyramid. So, at the beginning, they copy and then over time they start innovating in a new way and playing with tradition. And I just think all of this adds up to the soup, the rich kind of soup or stew of Middle Kingdom, which is complex to characterize.

EI-Shazly:

It is a fascinating period.

EI-Shazly:

So, what happened to the power of the king at the end of the Middle Kingdom, and during the second Intermediate Period?

Harvey:

Well, this is really important. Okay. So once again, I mentioned peaks and valleys, right. And this is how I like to teach it, there's ups and downs, but it also goes kind of sideways. What happens is that this questioning of the power of the king, the assassination of the king, and then the questioning about how much they can control power over the regions of Egypt is, I think, very much what becomes an issue. Maybe they gave too much power initially to these nomarchs. And this is the not monarchs. This is the Egyptology term that we use to mean the governors of different districts of Egypt, not unlike modern governors of governance in Egypt.

EI-Shazly:

I had students who wrote nomads.

Harvey:

But anyway, these governors were, you know, given great amount of power, perhaps appease local interests. But then over time, you have a problem, which is when your regional governments get very powerful and these regional governors even begun to consider themselves like kings, you're walking with very delicate balance. Now, you know, we don't know enough about the 13th dynasty, which is the last Middle Kingdom dynasty, really. But what we do know from some texts is that there were just a startling number of kings who ruled quickly, one after another, in rapid succession, something like 150 rulers in, you know, 100 years, it doesn't even make sense. Sometimes, you know, it'd be as if, like, you have rulers coming to the throne every other day or month or something, you know, it's overwhelming. It's crazy, and it's very hard to work out. Also, you know, we only archaeologically artistically started making sense of that period, in the past decades, so that when archaeologists in the late 19th century first started digging in Egypt, at Delta sites like Tanis, they came across all these colossal statues, and they were recarved over with other later kings' names. And we didn't even know who they belong to. And it was, it's been this job of over 140 years, let's say 150 years of actually sorting out all of that stuff that was moved from different earlier sites of the Middle Kingdom, to then move to Tanis, a much later site, and after 1000 BC, and then totally re carved and reused. I only mentioned this to say that we don't have clarity on the end of the Middle Kingdom. And we don't have clarity of exactly what happened. But what we know from the later accounts of historians is that Egypt fell apart again, after the Middle Kingdom, it fell into regional disarray, and a new powerful force came into the north to the Delta, in particular, the eastern Delta. And these individuals were set to be a foreign ethnicity, non-Egyptian ethnicity, and this group got called in the late sources that we have Hyksos which is a corruption of an ancient Egyptian word, we now know Hekau Khasut, which means the rulers of foreign lands. So, what happens is actually almost unthinkable from the Old Kingdom Middle Kingdom perspective, right, which is that the pharaohs in charge of the whole country for Mediterranean down

even into Sudan. And what we're instead talking about is that people who call themselves Pharaohs, who weren't even born Egyptians are ruling from a capital called Avaris in the eastern Delta. And the Egyptians are pushed to the south. So, it's civil war, but it's civil war with a difference because it's not just the Egyptian scrabbling amongst each other, about which local governor is going to be in charge of which area in which people, but in fact, dueling kings competing kingship, and we even have some sense that this competing kingship is earlier, including in the 13th dynasty. And in some very shadowy dynasties, we can't even put a number on, or a very good name to like the shadowy little mini dynasty that was just uncovered at Abydos by Joseph Wagner, which now just gets called the Abydos dynasty. We are in a period still of reckoning out the basics of Egyptian history when it comes to difficult periods, like the First Intermediate and the Second Intermediate period. In other words, the peace the times between these monumental Old Middle Kingdom and New Kingdom periods, we are really still sorting it out. And it's complex. But one of the greatest things has been over the past 50 years the excavations of this Hyksos City at Avaris, modern day Tell Dabaa. It is an extraordinary perspective of an excavation first really started by Manfred Beitzak, Viennese archaeologist, of how a city grows up from being actually interestingly and this gets back to the Middle Kingdom, a state established grid, iron, Egyptian city, or not even, let's say a settlement, which is formed in just grid iron. Absolutely regular streets up and down to being a very Canaanite place with temples to the Canaanite Gods with people who have completely different ethnic origins, probably spoke West Semitic languages, had different hairstyles, clothing, and different even weapons and pottery that they brought with them. Because the food they ate the dialect they spoke, all of it was exotic and not local. And this is an amazing, amazing thing, because it gives us a little window into something we had no idea really in any depth about, which is that in the Middle Kingdom, there had been a lot of people coming into Egypt, as let's say, laborers, we see it in the 12th dynasty, a lot of people showing up and steely on these carvings that even you know people have not great means, would say they had a servant who was from, from Canaan. And they would give them names or write their names, which are not Egyptian names. And we start seeing that there's an element in the population that's based on immigration. So we can think of today, for example,

we can think of massive population movements from Syria, from Iraq, from Afghanistan, from many, many countries in the modern, Middle East. And we can see how, you know, populations are shifting, if you get a taxi in Cairo today, it might be a Syrian driver, right. And, and so you start to see an element of the population based on immigration. It's not an invasion, you know, many early sources, like Manetho, it was recorded in Greek sources. It was an Egyptian historian was trying to talk about this very, by then very distant time to him around, let's say, 1650 BC, when we see this dissolution of the Middle Kingdom and the rise of this Hyksos people, these writers in a later time said it was an invasion by great force and like a storm coming through Egypt, you know, they write about it in this in this way. But in fact, the excavations and the testimony of the soil tells a completely different story. That is much more like the story of immigration, assimilation, and the rise of an ethnic minority to political power. And then what's amazing is these guys call themselves Pharaohs, even though and they reckon the 15th dynasty, the great Hyksos dynasty calls themselves Pharaohs. And then they try and in a way are successful in proving that they're more Egyptian than the Egyptians by promoting literature by promoting scientific study, it seems mathematical texts, all sorts of things that we think of as primary evidence for the most Egyptian cultural products are, in fact happening under some of these Hyksos kings in Avaris, and the Egyptian native rulers in Luxor or don't look very powerful. They look pretty shabby, to be honest, and it's not a moment of great royal power in the south, in fact, it's probably shaming. And we get a real sense about the attempts to shame the southern rulers by the Hyksos rulers from some of our literature and sources.

El-Shazly:

What happens in the 17th dynasty because you know, you have Ahmose is known as the King responsible for the expulsion of the Hyksos and that seems to have been very violent.

Harvey:

Right? Well, so what we have is, first of all, these Hyksos certainly did have elaborate weapons. And one thing we see is tremendous technological innovation. These folks knew how to have access to all sorts of things. And we don't have the full story on this, but I'm just going to list some of them; horses, chariots, compound bows, compound bows made like almost like plywood out of multiple laminated types of material horn and wood, that and sinews that can be used to fire more like a crossbow can fire so powerfully, much more powerfully than the traditional bows. Horses and chariots, of course, achieved a lot in terms of movement of troops and firing platform for arrows for these powerful bows. We see all sorts of new things popping up around the time of Ahmose, glass technology, and all sorts of new technologies. So many, in fact, that to list them is super long list. But what I want to say is that, yes, there's military activity, but there's also a lot of technological advantages that the Northerners have these Hyksos and because they're bringing culture and they're in connection with and in contact with peoples of the Near East, and one of the great stories that we only can read, you know, Barbara Mertz novels about or, you know, Elizabeth Peters novels or other historical fantasies about is how the southerners in the 17th dynasty, with how they were called these Luxor rulers, like Kamose got control of the horse and chariot technology, trained horses, built chariots, and then rose up against the North and took it over again, it's one of the gripping stories of all of world history, and we don't have it in very much detail.

EI-Shazly:

But we know that the Ahmose line was honored in the Theban tombs of the New kingdom. Why is that? Is that tell us more about how they were honored and Why?

Harvey:

Well, I think the first thing I should be clear about is that Nebpehty Re Ahmose was is normally now reckoned as the founder of the New kingdom, the defeater of the Hyksos, the one who finally, you know completed the defeat of the Hyksos and reunified Egypt and even pushed further north into the Levant,

fighting up into Palestine and down into Nubia. So, in doing this, you know, in order to reconsolidate what are the traditional borders of Egypt, you have to go beyond the traditional borders of Egypt and try to and that of course, leads the way and sets up the pathwork for the pathway for the Egyptian Empire of the New Kingdom, the richest golden era really that we have. Um, so Ahmose was seen as the kind of ruler par excellence of this Theban dynasty. But of course, the groundwork was laid a lot earlier by Kamose. Before him, maybe his brother, uncle, we don't know. And other rulers before that the Intef kings and ones who remain quite shadowy for us. But you know, the Egyptians like to pick out of a whole basket of Pharaohs, right, they would pick one and then really focus on that individual, as a particularly powerful or meaningful ruler. So, Ahmose seems to have had that role for later Egyptians down to a very long, late time. But in particular, we see something really interesting. It's not so much Ahmose, who is venerated the most in Luxor; it's his wife, Ahmose Nefertari. And it's Ahmose Nefertari was his sister and wife. Interestingly, it's Ahmose Nefertari and her son Amenhotep I and in my thinking, it's really specifically those two because after Ahmose dies, there is this big return of Luxor as a royal center under Amenhotep I. He's also remembered, he's bringing back the cult of Amun in a big way. He's building it Karnak on an unprecedented level. Karnak temple was a Podunk small temple, really local temple to a local God, prior to Amenhotep the first and the first was the first to build really what we think of as Karnak in a big way, and he raised up Amun Ra as a very, very important deity at that moment. And so, it's this kind of combination of not just being seen as a family of those who defended Egypt, but also those who championed Amun Ra, and started the move toward building monumental tombs in the Valley of the Kings that leads to the veneration of these particular royal family members. But it's not everybody who prays to them. It's in particular the artists and their families of Deir el-Medina, as we call it, now the workman's village that was set aside by the state for the building of royal tombs and their decoration. And it's these people who particularly saw Ahmose Nefertari and Amenhotep I as gods to whom they turn for, in particular in the case of the first to whom they turn for an Oracle to answer their daily questions about life and how it should go. And I really see this as, although we don't have evidence that Amenhotep I, built a tomb in the Valley of the Kings, and it doesn't seem to

have been the case. He may well have established the workmen's village and be seen as a founder God in this way, I think.

EI-Shazly:

That was fascinating. Thank you very much, Dr. Harvey for a very informative and very interesting discussion.

Harvey:

Well, thank you. It was a lot of fun to do.