CHAPTER FIVE

The First Egyptologist

Khaemwise, c. 1285–1225 BC

Ramesses II is the most famous of the Pharaohs, and there is no doubt that he intended this to be so. He is the Jupiter of the Pharaonic system, and this simile is appropriate, since the giant planet is brilliant at a distance but is essentially a ball of gas. Ramesses II, whose throne-name eventually gave rise to the Ozymandias of Strabo and Shelley, is the hieroglyphic equivalent of hot air. His name nowadays is known to every donkey-boy and tourist tout in the Nile valley, which is as it should be. Nevertheless, the truth is that Ramesses has gained the afterlife he would have wished: his mummy flies to Paris to be exhibited and reautopsied, and a series of airport-lounge bestsellers by a French author tells the story of his life to millions of readers. Yul Brynner captured the essence of his personality in the film *The Ten Commandments*, and he is often thought of as the Pharaoh of the Exodus. The history behind this has been much debated, but there is little doubt that the character of Ramesses fits the picture of the arrogant ruler who rejects divine demands. His battle against the Hittites at Qadesh in Syria was a near defeat, caused by an elementary failure of military intelligence, and saved only by the last-minute arrival of reinforcements from the Lebanese coast. In Ramesses' account, which figures large on many of his

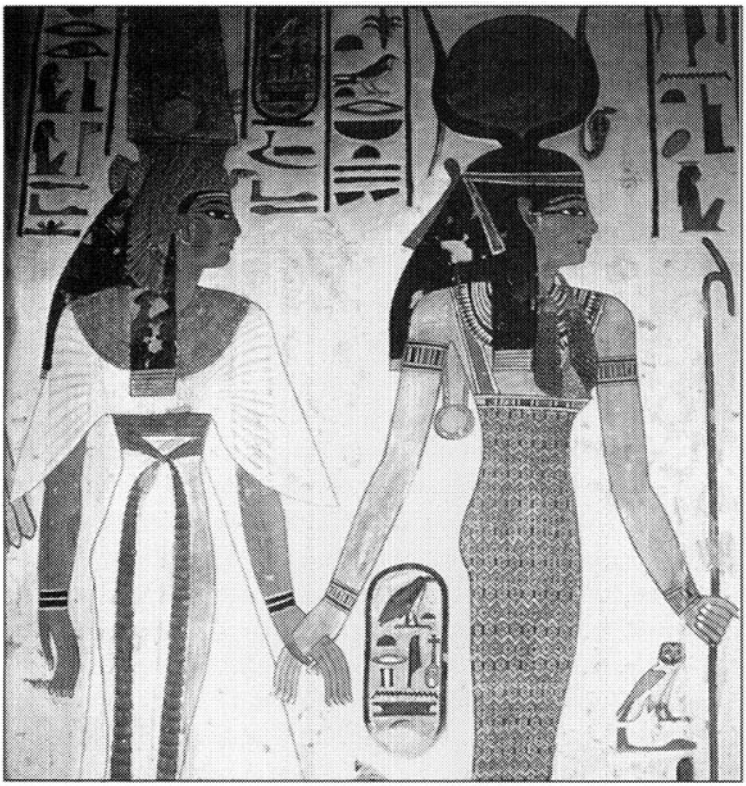
monuments, this near-debacle turns into the mother of all victories. James Baikie (1866–1931), a Scottish divine with a pawky streak, who wrote an excellent guidebook to the monuments of Egypt without feeling the need ever to visit the place, described the battle thus: 'The Egyptian court, we imagine, must have been slightly weary of the whole business. Ramesses, however, was not weary of seeing and hearing of his prowess, and it was Ramesses who called the tune, though the unfortunate soldiers of Amun and Re had paid the piper.' [1]

The traditional capitals, Memphis and Thebes, are not good enough for this Pharaoh, and he plans a new one in the Delta, modestly named Piramesse, which can be rendered as Ramessopolis. Not even Akhenaten had dared to name his city after himself. It must be admitted that the man thinks large, and this extends to his family, since he assures us that he is the father of more than 100 sons. With daughters he was not so successful, since he only mentions sixty of these, but it is possible that he had ceased to count them. Previous Pharaohs had adhered to the rule that, in temple design, incised relief was used on the exterior walls, since it casts strong shadows. Inside the temples, however, bas-relief was employed, since it does not produce such contrasts and creates a sensuous effect in the semi-dark. Unfortunately, bas-relief takes time, since the background needs to be cut away from around the figures. From now on, Ramesses decides to double the standard rate of temple-building, by seeing to it that most of the work is done in instant, inexpensive, incised relief. Akhenaten had tried the same trick, but he was in a genuine hurry, since he had abandoned traditional cities and needed a new one for his god. Ramesses II does not have this excuse. He is, when all is said, on the side of the cheap and nasty.

Revisionist accounts of Ramesses' reign make several points in his favour. The battle of Qadesh was followed by the international peace treaty with the Hittites, a copy of which is on the wall

of the General Assembly building of the United Nations. This is surely an achievement. A more general point is that modesty, as we have seen in the case of Hatshepsut, was not thought to be a Pharaonic virtue, and Ramesses is merely the logical extension of this. If kings of Egypt are great by definition, there is nothing wrong in going out of one's way to be the greatest; it is to be the essence of the thing. Another mitigating factor is the origin of Ramesses' family. The prototype of Ozymandias was the grandson of Ramesses I, a respected figure but known mainly as the man in the equivalent of the grey suit next to Horemheb. If Ramesses II took a look at recent history, he would have seen the anarchy of the Amarna period, an episode which was being rapidly purged from the record. Beyond this, however, lay the family of the Tuthmosides, a dynasty which was associated with prosperity, elegance, the growth of empire, and success. Another figure which loomed over the king was his father, Seti I, whose reign was one of the high points of Egyptian art, since it is marked by balance and restraint. These were the hard acts which it was Ramesses' duty to follow, and one way of doing this would be to bypass Seti, and to upstage the Tuthmosides by shouting louder than they had, so that they would no longer be heard. Ramesses II was temperamentally suited to this kind of role, and the gods gave him a reign of sixty-seven years in which to perfect it.

It is a relief to turn from this vainglorious man to his family, complicated though this was. Minor wives proliferated throughout the reign, but there are only two principal queens. One of these, Nefertari, is well known, thanks to her exquisitely decorated tomb in the Valley of the Queens at Luxor. This has been restored, and is one of the sights of Egypt. Good art is not unknown in Ramesses' reign, especially in the earlier years when artists from his father's court were still active, and it continued to flourish when not subjected to the dead weight of the king's ego. The monuments of Nefertari cluster in the south of the country, and



Nefertari, wife of Ramesses II, is escorted into the afterlife by the goddess Isis. From her tomb in the Valley of the Queens, Luxor.

this may in some way have been her sphere of influence. She owed her place in the king's affections partly to her charm, to which her inscriptions often refer, but also to the fact that she was the mother of several princes and princesses, including the eldest son and heir, who was given the cumbersome name Amenhiwenimmef, 'Amun is on his right hand'. Nefertari, whose name means 'The loveliest of them all', seems to have died before the thirtieth year of the reign. The second principal wife is Isinofre ('Isis the

beautiful'), who is less well known. The influence of this queen is more detectable in the north of the country, although her tomb seems also to have been in Luxor. She was more or less a contemporary of her rival, and she could boast that she had borne the king his second son, ingeniously named Ramesses, and a favourite daughter, who was given the Canaanite name Bintanath, 'Daughter of (the Syrian goddess) Anath'. Isinofre was also the mother of the fourth in line to the throne, a prince named Khaemwise, and it is to this unusual character that we turn.

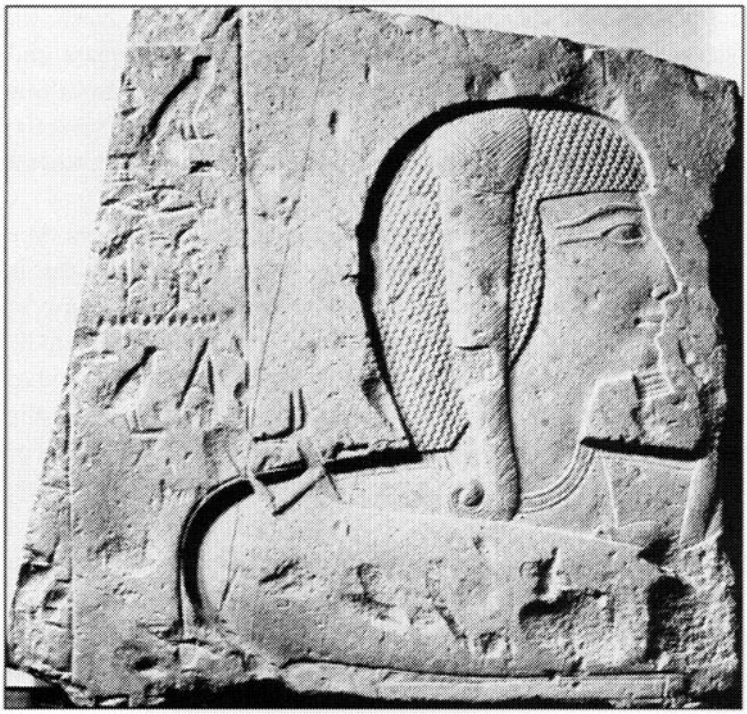
We have no way of knowing whether Khaemwise took after his mother, but we can safely say that he did not take after his father. Khaemwise's name means 'Manifest in Thebes', but names can be misleading. Most of his inscriptions and monuments are found in or near Memphis, and it may be that he saw this city as his home. This would be in line with the theory that his mother was also based in the north of the country. Alternatively, he may have been drawn to the place because of its antiquity, and because of the wealth of monuments that it contained even in his day. The past fascinated Khaemwise, and as a result Khaemwise fascinates Egyptologists, who see him as one of their own, although so far there is no popular work devoted to him. The truth is complex, but the title can stand. To us, he is the first Egyptologist, and, although there is no ancient Egyptian word for Egyptologist, it is a concept that this scholarly prince would have recognised.

Khaemwise was not entirely alone. The Ramesside period shows an increased interest in what we may term personal piety, and a sense of history. The upheavals of the Amarna period, and the reflections on the nature of Egyptian culture which followed it, would have encouraged this tendency, if they did not create it. Natural curiosity is shown by a hieroglyphic inscription on a fossilised sea-urchin, which was found by a Ramesside scribe in the desert near Heliopolis, where he dedicated it to the gods, because it was a wonder. Visits to ancient monuments became fashionable, and

in the opening chapter of this book we met the scribe Nashuyu, who went to see the monuments of Djoser and Teti at Saqqara, and left a graffito about it. Other such records are known from this period. However, this remained something of a leisure-time activity. With Khaemwise, the occasional afternoon outing becomes a full-time occupation.

Most of the principal sons of Ramesses are shown from time to time on his interminable battle reliefs, and for a while this is true of Khaemwise. He may even have seen military action early in his life, but it was soon clear that his talents were not going to lie in this direction. The prince gravitated towards the priesthood of Ptah, the principal god of Memphis. One of the names for the sanctuary of this god was Hikuptah, 'the house of the spirit [*ka*] of Ptah', an expression which passed to Ugarit on the Syrian coast, where it developed into one of the names for the country as a whole. This was later picked up by Greek traders, in the form Aigyptos, whence the modern equivalent. Ptah was a patron of craftsmanship and technology, and there was a rarefied side to his theology. Khaemwise may have learnt as an apprentice how Ptah created the universe using his heart (or mind), which conceptualised the elements of creation, and his tongue, which articulated and named them. This concept has similarities to the Judaic notion of the Word of God, which in turn influenced the Christian doctrine of the Logos; certainly it is a remarkable feat of abstraction. Such things are characteristic of a civilisation which created divine kingship, derived a unified principal from the plethora of local gods and goddesses, and put together the only rational calendar ever devised, which they liberated from the incompatibility between the length of the solar year and the mathematics of the lunar month. Other calendars, including our own, are a mess in comparison.

Khaemwise informs us that he entered the service of the god Ptah while still a youth. He no doubt rose through the ranks,



An idealised portrait of Prince Khaemwise, showing him with the conventional lock of youthful hair which was an emblem of the setem-priest. *Relief from one of the prince's monuments at Saqqara.*

although his rise will not have been hindered by the fact that he was related to the living god who ruled the realm. The priesthood has been an outlet for spare princes and sons of the aristocracy in many cultures, but with Khaemwise one has the impression that he was the right man in the right place. His ecclesiastical career reached its peak when he was appointed High Priest of Ptah at Memphis. This appointment may have taken place in the year 25, when Khaemwise would have been about thirty. In traditional terms he was the head of the religious hierarchy, although during

the New Kingdom the post of First Prophet of Amun at Karnak was more influential. One of the duties of the High Priest of Memphis was to help crown the Pharaoh, and he was in effect the keeper of much of the royal protocol. Even Alexander the Great, when he arrived in Egypt, is said to have submitted to some sort of coronation ceremony in Memphis. In addition to his duties towards the living king, the High Priest also acted in a filial role at the royal burial, and he is often shown wearing a leopard-skin, a traditional sign of prestigious rank, and with a lock of hair dangling from his forehead, which is a symbol of youth. A High Priest of Ptah could be shown like this even when he was well into his seventies; as often in Egyptian art, it is the icon which takes precedence over the mundane reality. A title given to the High Priest in this capacity was the Setem, a word of great antiquity and uncertain meaning, and it is under this alternative name that Khaemwise frequently appears. In reality he received this title some years before he became High Priest, which had the effect of marking him out as the heir presumptive to the office.

The High Priest of Memphis had access to the second finest temple library in Egypt, and he may have had the right to use the finest, which was at Heliopolis, a shortish journey to the north-east of Memphis. Antiquarian research came naturally to Khaemwise, and some of his inscriptions make the point that he was never happier than when reading the records of earlier times. His compositions are full of obscure words and convoluted turns of phrase. In this respect, he can settle into the familiar role of the armchair professor or scholarly priest. This is what he would be in the modern world, but it is more important to see how he fits into his own society.

Ramesses II's attitude to his sons must have been ambiguous. He could be as proud of them as any father, trumpeting about them constantly on his monuments, but they were also a source of rivalry. Many of the princes predeceased him, which is partly

explicable by the great age to which he survived, but it is not entirely explicable in this way. Some of the sons may have been perceived as threatening, in which case they would have been sidelined in one way or another. A policy of divide and rule by the king would have led to rivalries, some of which may have been deadly. Khaemwise's scholarly activities were not a threat, although there may have been times when he needed to hide his knowledge, since contradicting or correcting Ramesses II might not have been a good career move. The son had the intelligence to realise that he could use his antiquarian interests in a way which reflected glory on his overwhelming parent. It is no accident that the reign of this ruler has given us a number of king-lists, either on papyrus (a fragmentary one exists in Turin, which would have been invaluable had it been preserved intact), or written on the walls of temples and even private tombs. One was found in the temple which Ramesses II built to the god Osiris at Abydos. In this composition, the dead kings of the past are assimilated, not simply to Osiris as is usual, but to the figure of Ramesses himself. He is their embodiment, and therefore the culmination of the entire historical process. To commemorate the kings of the past, and to find out more about them, was to commemorate the king *par excellence* who enshrined them. Archaeology has always been a promiscuous discipline, hiring out its favours to political ideas, notions of ethnicity, or religious beliefs, depending on the needs of the client. The past was going to serve the present, and Khaemwise was willing to be part of this.

At some point Khaemwise must have set out to walk the plateau of Giza and Saqqara, inspecting the pyramids of the Old Kingdom which had looked out over Memphis for more than a millennium. Even in his day some of these were past their best, partly through the effects of time, but also owing to the Pharaohs' habit of recycling the monuments of their predecessors whenever they had the opportunity. A programme of restoration was set in

progress, which could serve a variety of purposes: the memory of the great monarchs of old would be honoured, knowledge of the past could be enriched, and the monuments themselves would be spiritually updated, so that they became part of the glory which was Ramesses. Instead of a pyramid, the late Fourth-Dynasty king Shepseskaf built himself an unusual oblong tomb, of the type known as a *mastaba*. It was already 1,200 years old when Khaemwise inspected it, but this too came in for the treatment. The names of Shepseskaf were inscribed on its exterior wall, facing those of Ramesses, and below this was set the following:

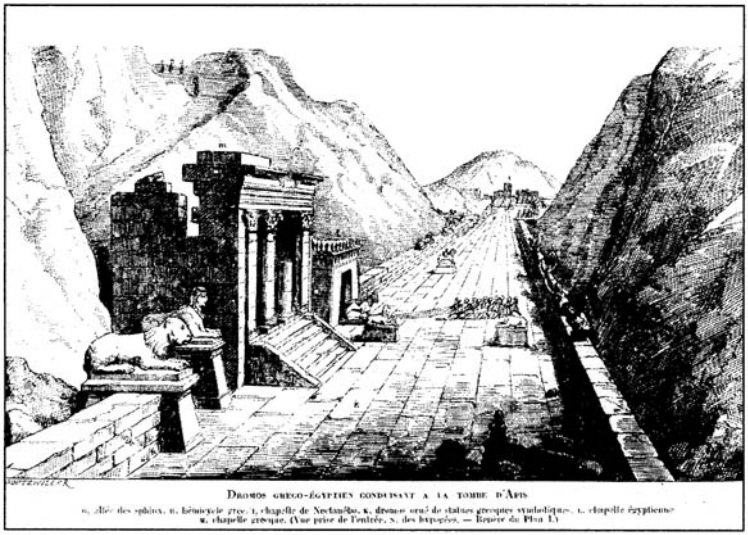
> His Majesty instructed the High Priest of Ptah and Setem, Khaemwise, to inscribe the cartouche of king Shepseskaf, since his name could not be found on the face of his pyramid [*sic*], inasmuch as the Setem Khaemwise loved to restore the monuments of the kings, making firm again what had fallen into ruin.

This is piety indeed, and the Egyptian words which can be translated as 'pious' and 'piety' are constantly used by Khaemwise. 'Consider these pious works' is one of his refrains. However, the piety was also a form of flattery. An important part of the king's religious function was to dispel darkness and chaos from the land, and rescuing monuments from oblivion was as good a way as any of demonstrating this. Variations of this text appear on several monuments at Saqqara and nearby, and there must have been others, now lost. However, a more intimate sign of Khaemwise's love of the past is found in a fragmentary text on the statue of a man named Kawab. Khaemwise must have come across this statue somewhere near the tomb of this man, a son of the builder of the Great Pyramid, who had lived and died more than 1,000 years before him. In effect, Khaemwise was conducting an excavation at Giza. His reaction to this find he describes himself:

> It was the High Priest and Prince Khaemwise who delighted in this statue of the king's son Kawab, which he discovered in the fill of a shaft [?] in the area of the well of his father Khufu. [He acted] so as to place it in the favour of the gods, among the glorious spirits of the chapel of the necropolis, because he loved the noble ones who dwelt in antiquity before him, and the excellence of everything they made, in very truth, a million times.

There is no better description of what it is to be an Egyptologist. The reference to the chapel in which this statue was rededicated suggests that it functioned as a sort of museum for objects rescued from the sands, and this idea is not fanciful, because other examples of royal collections of antiquities are known from our sources. The reference to the nobility of the past may not be mere romance; Khaemwise could have found some aspects of the world he lived in unsatisfactory, and not always noble.

Khaemwise's reading extended to matters of theology, and he began to think about the implications of one of the most characteristic aspects of Egyptian religion, the cult of sacred animals. One of these, the Apis bull, we have already mentioned, but it is time to return to it, since it was destined to play a part in Khaemwise's life. The Apis was based in Memphis, where it had its own temple complete with stall, and it occupied the place in the animal world which Pharaoh did in the human. One of its titles was 'king of every sacred animal'. Another of its epithets was 'incarnation of Ptah', where the first word comes from a root meaning 'to repeat'. Translation is difficult, but to use a term derived from Hinduism, we can say that the Apis was an avatar, and he represented the god of Memphis whose priest Khaemwise was. The Apis, like a Pharaoh, eventually grew old and died, whereupon he went to Osiris. The burial places of the earlier Apis bulls are unknown, but from the reign of Amenophis III they began to be interred in the desert at Saqqara, to the west of the Step Pyramid. As it happens,



The avenue leading to Khaemwise's Serapeum. Nineteenth-century drawing made at the time of the excavation by Auguste Mariette. It was on this avenue that Hor of Sebennytos dreamt he met the ghost, as related in Chapter 8 (p. 151).

this innovation is associated with another king's son, Tuthmosis, who was the elder brother of Akhenaten. This prince, who would have come to the throne as Tuthmosis V if he had lived, took an interest in animal-cults: in the Cairo Museum there is a sarcophagus which he caused to be made for his pet feline, which shows the animal in the form of a mummy, bearing the somewhat hybrid name 'Osiris the she-cat'. Khaemwise felt an affinity with this unusual prince, and may have modelled himself upon him. If Tuthmosis had lived, there would not have been an Amarna period, and cults like the Apis could be seen almost as an antidote to Akhenaten and his experiments in heresy. There was more that could be done for the Apis, and Khaemwise set about doing it.

The last Apis to be buried in isolation at Saqqara was laid to rest in year 30 of Ramesses II. The next step was the excavation of

an entire catacomb below the area of the isolated Apis burials. Here the bulls were to be accommodated in a series of vaults, each containing a granite sarcophagus, weighing up to eighty tons. The vaults were linked by a communicating corridor, excavated by Khaemwise's masons, and running through the rock for a distance of more than 100 yards. This gallery fulfilled its purpose down to the beginning of the Twenty-sixth Dynasty, when the whole was enlarged. The later galleries in the complex were still in use in the time of Cleopatra, and they are familiar to modern tourists as the Serapeum. Above the catacomb there was a temple dedicated to Osiris-Apis, the collective aspect of the dead Apises who had lived on earth, as well as to the living Apis. In his dedicatory inscription, Khaemwise allows himself a touch of bombast which was standard in inscriptions of this sort:

> O Setem-priests and High Priests of the house of Ptah, divine fathers, and duty-priests ... who are before the god, who shall enter this temple which I have made for the living Apis and who shall look upon these things which I have done, engraved upon its stone walls ... Surely this will seem a pious thing to you, when you compare the ancestors, with their poor and ignorant work ... Remember my name in [your] decrees ...

This sniping at the ancestors sounds like a lapse of taste when compared with Khaemwise's other inscriptions, but the superlatives are justified in such a case, and the gods were used to rhetoric of this sort. He was a High Priest, after all, and a son of the master of hyperbole. It is also likely that such an inscription needed to be run past Khaemwise's father.

If Khaemwise was the first Egyptologist, he was also the first to realise that to study Egyptology it helps if one has an income. The priesthood of Ptah was no doubt rewarding, financially as well as intellectually, and he would also have received some

settlement as a son of Ramesses. He built up a considerable estate, which may well have functioned on its own, leaving him free to study his archaic texts.

In Leiden, there is a papyrus which contains part of the logbook of one of his ships. The text covers a few days in the winter of year 52 of the king's reign (c. 1228 BC). At the beginning of the voyage, the ship is moored at Piramesse, the new capital in the Delta. Deliveries to the crew are listed, and comings and goings recorded, with messengers from time to time leaving for Memphis with letters for the Setem, as Khaemwise is regularly termed in this document. In addition to members of the crew, there are other persons who appear to be passengers. Then the ship sets sail, and on the third day of the third month of winter, 'the sky filled with a strong south wind'. This is characteristic of the period from February to April in Egypt, and it can presage sandstorms. The following day, in the evening, the boat docked at Heliopolis. Such a journey was not for pleasure, nor for the purpose simply of moving passengers from one place to another. It was a trading enterprise, with produce brought on board and sold again further along the river. Such a boat could easily have paid for itself over a few years. In addition, there is evidence that Khaemwise's trading activities could stretch wider than this. In the somewhat fantastical tale known as *The Voyage of Wenamun*, the eponymous hero has a long debate with Zekerba'al, the ruler of Byblos on the Phoenician coast. At one point, the wily Levantine remonstrates with him:

> 'See now, I have not done to you what was done to the messengers of Khaemwise. They spent seventeen years in this land, and they died on the spot.' Then he told his cupbearer, 'Take him to see the tomb where they lie.' But I said to him, 'Do not make me see it.'

The messengers of this tale would have gone to Lebanon for

the same reason that Wenamun did: to buy cedar wood and other timber, either for one of the temples or directly for the Crown. There are some elements in *Wenamun* which are reminiscent of Homer's *Odyssey*, but this is not a reason to doubt that such a mission could have taken place. The text is later than Khaemwise by about two centuries, but there may well be fact in it as well as fiction.

So far we have created a picture of a tranquil scholar with considerable means, and this would have been true for much of Khaemwise's career. However, as the reign wore on the demands that were made on the king's fourth son continued to grow. One by one his elder brothers passed away, and Khaemwise came closer to the throne. This in itself would have meant greater protocol, and with it other responsibilities. However, the exacerbating factor was Ramesses' addiction to publicity. Pharaohs who reigned for thirty years were entitled to celebrate a jubilee. Thereafter they were permitted more jubilees, but at discreet intervals. Ramesses became a jubilee junkie, celebrating these jamborees in years 30, 33, 36, 39, 40, 42, 45, 48, 52, 54, 57, 60, 63 and 66. The burden of organising many of these fell upon Khaemwise, and he will have spent months on each occasion travelling up and down the country, seeing that the right statues of the right gods were available for the festivities, embracing local dignitaries, and generally drawing up plans for the ceremonials. This was good for his standing at court, but there must have been occasions when he longed for the quiet and cool of his temple libraries, and there may have been times when he silently wished for the process to come to its natural end.

Instead of his father, it was Khaemwise who came to an end. The endless procession of durbars wore him out, and, by regnal year 60, the heir apparent was no longer Khaemwise, but the king's thirteenth son, an elderly prince named Merneptah who was to succeed to the throne. So Khaemwise's gods willed.

One of the most remarkable discoveries of recent years has been made near the entrance to the Valley of the Kings. This is the tomb numbered KV5. Strictly speaking, this tomb was already known, since it had been glanced at in 1825 by an adventurer named James Burton. It was assumed to be incomplete, perhaps a false start for the tomb of Ramesses II which was built further inside the Valley. However, an American team returned to this tomb in the 1990s, cleared it out, and concluded that it was nothing less than the communal resting-place of Ramesses' many sons. It was constructed on two levels within the rock, and the whole bears a resemblance to a multi-storey car park. Its various chambers may amount to 150, which would almost correspond to the round numbers of sons and daughters which Ramesses boasted. Work on this remarkable monument will take years, but it is not difficult to see similarities between this catacomb for human royalty and the Serapeum, a complex which was intended for the royalty of the animal world. It is possible that Khaemwise had a hand in both projects, but, whatever the original intention, the High Priest of Memphis was not destined to be buried in KV5.

We are not sure precisely where Khaemwise is buried. In the early 1850s the French archaeologist Auguste Mariette began clearing the Serapeum, making an unbroken series of major discoveries, but working in considerable haste. In the centre of the main gallery built by Khaemwise Mariette claimed to have found the mummified remains of a man wearing a golden funerary mask, accompanied by jewellery bearing the cartouches of Ramesses II. However, the mummy has now disappeared, and there is even doubt whether it was human, whilst the fact that Mariette was resorting to explosives at this stage of his work adds a vigorous but somewhat imprecise note to the record. Khaemwise could have been buried in the Serapeum, or somewhere near it, and it may be that he is like Imhotep, still waiting for excavators beneath the sands of Saqqara.

A twist to the tale is added by a Japanese team, who in the 1990s started to excavate a building on the top of a natural rise looking out over the area of the Serapeum. This rise was clearly visible from the excavations in the Sacred Animal Necropolis which were mentioned in Chapter 1, and the author, who in the late 1960s was a junior member of the excavation team, remembers wondering what lay on top of this prominent hill. At the time, this area was a military zone, and out of bounds to archaeologists. The building found by the Japanese turned out to be a curious temple-like structure, decorated with texts and reliefs in honour of Khaemwise. Its design is unique in Egyptian architecture, and it is probably the result of Khaemwise's researches into arcane literature. It is a shrine to the dead prince's cult, but as yet there is no sign of his tomb. From the temple on the ridge, the spirit of Khaemwise could have gazed west, to the endless desert, or taken in the view of all the pyramids from Giza in the north to Dahshur in the south, while to the east he could have looked towards Memphis, his earthly home.

Khaemwise has the most colourful afterlife of any character in this volume. In order to do this he had to give up his personal name, while his administrative title, the Setem, was garbled into Setne. It is under this name that he appears in a number of tales written in demotic, a form of hieroglyphic shorthand, some 1,000 years after his death. The Setne of these tales is sometimes recognisable as the scholarly priest who spent his time reading the writings on the monuments, but he has picked up some ribald characteristics over the intervening years. The first tale, which is Ptolemaic, is now in the Cairo Museum. Here we find Setne in characteristic style, reading hieroglyphs on temple walls, when he receives a tip-off that a book containing the secrets of the universe is hidden in an ancient tomb. Eventually he finds the tomb and enters it, where he is entertained by a friendly family of ghosts who tell him their life story. He rewards the ghosts' hospitality by

making off with the book, and the text describes how he came back along the tomb shaft with the light from the magical scroll illuminating his path. The ghosts seek revenge by visiting a series of humiliations on Setne, designed to bring him to his senses. The climax comes when the ghosts create a phantom woman of outstanding beauty, named Tabubu. Setne sees this lady one day in the temple of Ptah, and tries to arrange an assignation with her. Her reply can be paraphrased as, 'What sort of woman do you think I am? Here's my address.' Setne proceeds with his assignation, but the phantom woman, after making a series of crippling financial demands, disappears into thin air at the crucial moment, leaving Setne lying on the ground in a state of undisguised embarrassment. At this moment Pharaoh walks in. As the text puts it, 'Setne tried to rise, but he could not rise because of the shame that he was in, for he had no clothes on.' This inappropriate event convinces him that struggle against the ghosts is futile. He makes his peace with them, and they are once more laid to rest, with their book.

Setne learnt something as a result of this encounter, and he learns something else in the second tale, which dates from the beginning of the Roman period and is in the British Museum. In this story, Setne and his wife have no son, but following a dream a miraculous child is born to them. The child, Si-Osiri ('Son of Osiris'), turns out to be something of a portentous know-all. One day father and son see two funerals, one of a rich man and another of a poor man with no one to mourn him. Setne expresses the wish that, when he dies, he may be buried in splendour like the rich man, but Si-Osiri replies that, if his father knew anything at all, he would pray to be buried like the poor one. Si-Osiri takes Setne to the necropolis, where they find a tomb-entrance which leads directly to the Underworld. There, in one part of eternity, are the damned, suffering great torments, including being made to plait ropes which everlasting donkeys immediately chew to

ribbons. One man has the pivot of the door of the netherworld fixed in his eye; he is the rich man whose funeral they had seen, and whose conduct in life has been found wanting by the judges of eternity. Finally they come into the presence of Osiris, who is attended by a man in radiant robes, taking the god's dictation. He is the poor man, whose life had been found good. The similarity to the parable of Dives and Lazarus has often been noted, although the idea that paradise consists of becoming a bureaucrat is typically Egyptian. After all this it emerges that Si-Osiri is a famous magician from the past who has arranged to be reborn in order to save Egypt from disaster at the hands of a Nubian sorcerer. His work accomplished, he vanishes, phoenix-like, in flames, and that night Setne's wife conceives a real son.

It is impossible to know how much of the character of the historical Khaemwise is preserved in the Setne stories, which were highly popular in later Egypt. The odds are that Khaemwise would have been ashamed of Setne and his unacademic adventures, but this is not a problem for us. We can be content that both characters are part of the richness of Egyptian civilisation.