

ETHNOLOGY

# Pity the Poor Pharaohs!

## Egypt's Ancient Sky Religion Called for Seven-Year Reign; If Pharaoh Wasn't Dead Then He Had to Commit Suicide

By EMILY C. DAVIS

**H**AVE YOU ever felt sorry for the haughty, glamorous Pharaohs of history?

Ten to one, you never have.

Yet, an Egyptologist now advances the theory that young Tutankhamun and many other Egyptian kings were caught personally in a pitiable trap. Theirs was the same prospect faced by dashing Francois Villon in the romance "If I Were King."

You recall in that story, Villon was made king of France for a day, and cruelly told he must die at the end of it. But long before medieval France, kings of Egypt were actually living out such dramatic episodes, knowing all too well when they took the throne that they might expect to die at a set time. Usually, Pharaoh was allowed seven years to live—a little better than the day offered poet-adventurer Villon, but nothing to make a Pharaoh light-hearted.

### Seven Years—and Then!

Seven, perhaps nine, years of glory—and then—!

This theory, that Egypt's rulers were pitiful victims of an ancient sky-religion to which Egypt tenaciously clung, is advanced by G. A. Wainwright, former inspector-in-chief of Egypt's Antiquities Department.

Mr. Wainwright has been reading between the lines in Egyptian history, religion, and legends. What he has found puts an entirely different light on the Pharaohs, and on many a curious turn in Egypt's history.

On the surface, you see the Pharaoh as a glittering, enviable figure. Everybody is bowing and scurrying to carry out his whims. He lives magnificently in a luxurious palace. The Nile country is plastered with monuments telling how colossal he is. Millions of people are at his command, to fight his battles or build him a tomb.

All Egypt seems to exist merely to glorify this star—the Pharaoh. But under the surface, there may be personal tragedy.

It goes back, the Egyptologist explains, to beliefs that people in North

Africa held long before Egypt became a civilized land. To understand it, you have to think of primitive tribes searching the sky for rain. When the rain fell there was a good crop and plenty of wild game, and everyone could eat and be comfortable. But when rains held off there was starvation and misery.

So in Libya, North Africa, as in many other parts of the world, human beings worried over their dependence on rain. They not only talked about the weather. They tried desperately to do something about it.

### Magicians Made Rain

There arose, then, magicians with sky powers, who in time developed into priest-kings. Rain could be brought down, it was believed, by knowing the proper rites and words, and by personal sanctification.

Being the cleverer men of a group, magicians often made good. Success was partly a matter of learning what they could about weather signs—so as to choose likely times for rain-making rites. But if rain failed, the rain-maker was quick to announce that sky-gods were angry with the people's sacrifices or behavior.

Out of such primitive reasoning and faith came Egypt's early sky-religion. Important among the early sky gods was Seth, god of rain and storm, a god to whom the pig and the hippopotamus were sacred. Also, there was Min, an old, old god of fertility, who evolved into Egypt's super-powerful god Amun.

Egypt's kings were close to such gods as these, and supposedly even had divine powers as representatives of the gods on earth. Reduced to practical terms, this meant Pharaoh was charged with Egypt's weather control and health insurance.

In Egypt, to be sure, climate had changed so that rain was no longer the prime need. Rather, Egyptian farmers worried about the Nile. The annual flood of the Nile must be exactly right in quantity to irrigate the fields. It became Pharaoh's business to control the Nile.

Hence, when you read the fantastic string of powers and titles attached to an Egyptian king's name, don't think

too scornfully that this was all silly vanity. Some of these titles, like "Lord of the Sky, Lord of the Earth, Leader who directeth the two Banks of the Nile, Lord of Destiny, creating the plenteous harvest," and so on, were the unfortunate man's royal duties. They were set down with precise and terrible realism.

The phrases Lord of the Sky, and others just mentioned, were among those addressed to Ramesses the Second by courtiers on one occasion. Ramesses is one of the Pharaohs who ruled along about the time when the Children of Israel were in bondage in Egypt. Whether it was he, or another Pharaoh before whom Moses and Aaron stood when they demanded that Pharaoh let the children of Israel go, the man on Egypt's throne must have been in an embarrassing spot. He was supposedly god-like in his control of nature. Everybody said so. Yet the Israelite leaders challenged his powers and called down plagues on Egypt in the name of their own god, Jehovah.

Ordinarily, of course, no one checked up on Pharaoh's efficiency as a weather control agency, or as guardian of national life and health. Pharaoh was above that, being divine.

### Deadly Last Duty

But being god-like was precisely Pharaoh's dilemma. For, according to the ancient religious reasoning, it was supposed by the masses that the divine ruler could pass on full god-like power to his successor only if he laid down his life in its prime. Pharaoh's last duty was to slay himself or be slain.

Mr. Wainwright explains that this sacrifice has been required of king-priests in many lands and eras. There are tribes in Uganda, Africa, that require the ruler to commit suicide. In ancient Italy at Nemi the divine priest had to be slain by his successor, a runaway slave. In ancient Prussia the divine king used to light his own funeral pyre.

Egypt's traditional ending for a Pharaoh was by fire.

There are classical tales in Egypt about kings who died in this way. And Mr. Wainwright says they are not fairytale nonsense. They record "details of the Old Religion and the horrors enacted under it."

King Mycerinus, who lived in the pyramid building age near 3000 B. C., was one Pharaoh who ruled seven years and then—reluctantly—accepted the order to die. Mycerinus complained, so later historians averred, because he had to die early although he was very religious and permitted sacrifices in the old manner. It seemed unfair to him, considering that the great pyramid-building Pharaohs Cheops and Chephren had with hardboiled determination refused to let the people sacrifice, and had included themselves firmly in the “no sacrifice” decrees. They lived to good old ages, both of them. But Mycerinus died.

Women Pharaohs, as well as men, died for their country. Even beauty did not save them.

### Lovely But Doomed

There is a story which may have elements of truth in it about divine, golden-haired, red-cheeked Nitocris who was set on the throne when Egyptians slew the reigning Pharaoh, her brother. This blonde Pharaoh, with a high sense of royal duty, brought her people victory, drowned her brother's murderers, and at the end of seven years “cast herself into a room full of ashes.”

After the pyramid age, during which Mycerinus and Nitocris reputedly were slain, Pharaohs were usually successful in evading or escaping this divine fate, judging by clues in the records.

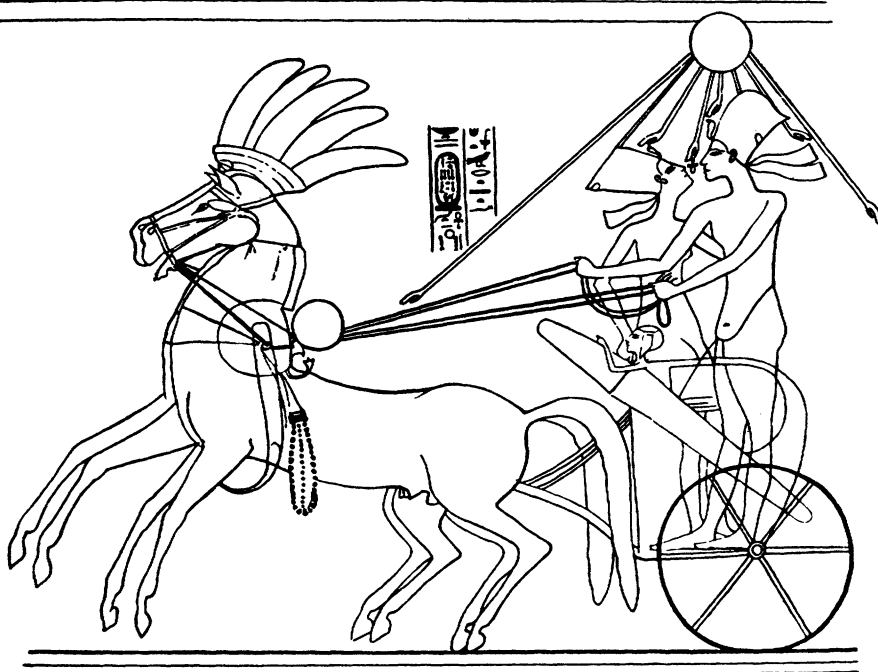
There were various ways for a Pharaoh to outwit death. He might, for instance, be bold enough to say he could renew his youth by magic. Ramesses the Second got away with this.

Or, a Pharaoh might convince his people that sacrificing a substitute, either man or animal, was “just as good.” Or, he might enact the rite in a play, and survive.

Some Pharaohs, who were lucky, escaped untimely deaths because they lived in eras when the Old Religion was not so popular as later religions, such as worship of the sun-god Re.

A good many Pharaohs escaped death by making the sun-god's religion official. This was clever strategy, since the sun cult had no sinister seven-year plan, climaxed by slaying a king.

Mr. Wainwright suspects that what we know about Egypt's religions has been considerably distorted by this fact that so many Pharaohs gave prominence to the religion of the sun. As the religion under royal patronage, worship of Re got wide publicity on monuments and inscriptions. The older and more



### HE DIDN'T WANT TO DIE

*Pharaoh Akhenaten, father-in-law of Tutankhamun, with a prosperous kingdom, a beautiful wife and children to whom he was devoted, had every reason for wanting to live beyond the seven years conventionally allowed an Egyptian ruler by the old sky religion. This may have had something to do with his zeal in propagating his monotheistic reform.*

fundamental religion might continue to hold the people, but its strength was not proclaimed in enduring stone.

Tutankhamun's father-in-law, the Pharaoh Akhenaten, made a tremendous effort to wipe out the old gods of Egypt, and to replace them with the worship of one god, the sun disk. Akhenaten has been much praised as an idealist who caught a wonderful vision of the worship of one god. Mr. Wainwright's theory introduces a different motive for Akhenaten's religious revolution. Akhenaten may have been a desperately frightened man.

When he closed the old gods' temples, and moved his entire capital to a brand-new city, Akhenaten was, perhaps, making a fight for life. When he wreaked special vengeance on the images of one priest of the old gods, there was doubtless a reason. Mr. Wainwright suspects that the reason was this: the priest was the one who would have sent Akhenaten the official order to die.

“As with Cheops' and Chephren's, Akhenaten's revolt was shortlived,” he says, “and the rebels were soon brought back to a sense of duty.”

After Akhenaten, young Tut came to the throne. The powers behind the throne forced the young man to change

his name from Tut-ankh-Aton, which meant “the life of the sun's disk is pleasing,” to Tut-ankh-Amun, “the life of Amun is pleasing.” Pharaoh Tutankhamun had to return to Thebes, where the old god Amun was supreme. And there young King Tut died and was buried—after a nine-year reign, or seven years after he accepted the god Amun.

“All this,” the Egyptologist reasons, “is extraordinarily suggestive of his having to accept the age-old doom of the divine kings of the sky-fertility-religions the world over, and having to render up his life for the good of his people.”

Tutankhamun did at least escape death by fire. Many Pharaohs seem to have fought for that point and won.

As late as 712 B. C., though, an Egyptian Pharaoh died in the flames. This happened to Pharaoh Bocchoris, who reigned at a time when Libyans had seized Egypt's throne. Libya was the original homeland of the old sky-religion. Naturally enough, the Libyans re-enforced their time-tried ceremonies. Bocchoris ruled seven years. And it was his successor who instigated his death. Doubtless, a good many kings were maneuvered into destruction by ambitious heirs to the throne, who believed they themselves could out- (Turn to Page 74)

## From Page 71

wit a similar fate. At any rate, Bocchoris died, and Mr. Wainwright calls the scene "the culminating horror of the Old Religion."

There are people alive in Egypt today who can remember seeing a play-acted form of Egypt's ancient, once tragic rite. For in small towns of Upper Egypt as recently as sixty years ago, the Coptic New Year was celebrat-

ed by having a villager in costume act as a mock king, Abu Nerez, father of the New Year. After three days of carnival, the dress of the mock-king was burned and from the ashes emerged a peasant farmer. And this, Mr. Wainwright concludes, was the last burlesqued remnant of Egypt's royal sacrifices.

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*Science News Letter, February 4, 1939*

### ENGINEERING

# Degree of Air Pollution Shown in Survey of Cities

## Home Fires Among Greatest Offenders, Especially In Regions Where Coal Has High Sulfur Content

**R**ESULTS of a fifteen-month survey of sulfur gases in the air in great metropolitan centers show that St. Louis is the worst American offender, according to the report of the Air Hygiene Foundation and the Mellon Institute, (*Science*, Jan. 20.)

In figures indicating the parts of sulfur dioxide per million parts of air, five metropolitan areas rate as follows:

	<i>Average</i>
St. Louis-East St. Louis .....	.128
Pittsburgh .....	.057
Detroit .....	.028
Philadelphia-Camden .....	.027
Washington .....	.009

The above figures have, however, no significance from a public health standpoint, according to hygienists connected with the investigation.

Over 50,000 separate air tests were made by six chemists travelling in a special fleet of laboratory cars, states John F. McMahon, executive secretary of the Foundation. These chemists canvassed industrial centers of the East, South and Midwest and made tests covering all hours of day and night and all seasons of the year.

Home fires, the survey showed, are among the greatest contributors to air pollution, particularly in districts burning coal of a high sulfur content. The home fuel factor explains why the sulfur pollution was about 50 per cent higher during the winter heating season than in summer.

A close relationship was found between wind velocity and sulfur dioxide in the

air. The higher the wind, the cleaner the air. Fogs catch and store up sulfur fumes, Mr. McMahon reports. Some of the highest concentrations were obtained on foggy nights.

Occasional tests were made in a score of other cities during the test but the results, the report warns, cannot be compared with those obtained in the more extensive studies. In these occasional tests Chicago showed a sulfur dioxide contamination of .067 parts per million; Wheeling, W. Va., showed .070; and Cleveland .064.

*Science News Letter, February 4, 1939*

### POPULATION

## Fathers Gain Attention From Population Experts

**F**ATHERS are usually ignored by statisticians calculating the future of the population just as the groom at a wedding is ignored by the society reporter.

The hope of a nation for perpetuating itself is usually figured on the basis of the rate at which mothers are succeeded by child-bearing daughters, the "net reproduction rate." This rate in recent years has been very low in Europe and America so that statisticians foresee a future in which the population no longer grows.

But fathers have their importance in these calculations, also. When it is desired to take account of the difference in reproduction rate between occupations or economic classes, then maternal reproduction rate is not enough, because no census gives details about the ages

of wives according to the occupations of their husbands.

The rate at which fathers are succeeded by sons of paternal age has been figured for Sweden and for England and Wales by Dr. Christopher Tietze, population expert. It is higher than the replacement rate of mothers for three reasons. The time separating father from son is greater than the length of a generation for women, husbands being usually a few years older than their wives. New-born boys outnumber new-born girls. And war losses and male emigration brought a feminine surplus to many European nations.

In Sweden, mothers produce only 69 per cent of the number of daughters required to replace them. Fathers produce 78 per cent of enough sons to take their places.

As far back as 1911, England's upper and middle classes, her lawyers, physicians, teachers, and clergymen were failing to replace themselves with sons. Paternity rates were highest for skilled workmen and miners. Textile workers, like the wealthy, had a paternity rate too low for eventual survival.

Why the difference between miners and textile workers? Dr. Tietze explains that the wives of miners are comparatively isolated. The wives of textile workers, often themselves employed, get out and talk with other women.

*Science News Letter, February 4, 1939*

## ● Earth Trembles

Information collected by Science Service from seismological observatories and relayed to the U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey and the Jesuit Seismological Association resulted in the location of the following provisional epicenter:

*Tuesday, January 24, 10:32.3 p.m., E.S.T.*  
Slightly inland near the coast of Chile. Latitude 37 degrees south, longitude 72.5 degrees west.

Stations cooperating with Science Service in reporting earthquakes recorded on their seismographs are:

University of Alaska, College, Alaska; Apia Observatory, Apia, Western Samoa; University of California, Berkeley, Calif.; Des Moines Observatory, Des Moines, Iowa; Dominion Observatory, Ottawa; Dominion Meteorological Observatory, Victoria, B. C.; The Franklin Institute, Philadelphia; Harvard University Observatory, Harvard, Mass.; University of Hawaii, Honolulu; Hong Kong Observatory, Hong Kong, China; Magnetic Observatory of the Carnegie Institution of Washington, Huancayo, Peru; Massachusetts Institute of Technology, East Machias, Maine; University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Mich.; Montana School of Mines, Butte, Mont.; Montana State College, Bozeman, Mont.; Pennsylvania State College, State College Pa.; Phu Lien Observatory, near Hanoi, French Indo-China; Seismological Observatory, Pasadena, Calif.; University of South Carolina, Columbia, S. C.; University of Vermont, Burlington, Vt.; U. S. Weather Bureau, University of Chicago; University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wis.; Zikawei Observatory, near Shanghai, China; observatories of the Jesuit Seismological Association at Canisus College, Buffalo, N. Y., Fordham University, New York City; Georgetown University, Washington, D. C.; St. Louis University, St. Louis; St. Xavier College, Cincinnati; and Weston College, Weston, Mass.; observatories of the U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey at San Juan, P. R., Sitka, Alaska, Tucson, Ariz., and Ukiah, Calif.