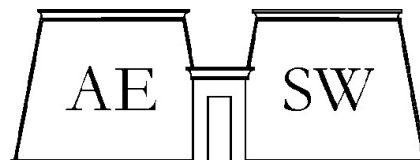


An Ancient Egyptian King List of the 1st till 6th Dynasty

by

Sjef Willockx



Ancient Egypt, by Sjef Willockx

<http://www.egyptology.nl>
info@egyptology.nl

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
1. King list of the 1 st dynasty	7
2. King list of the 2 nd dynasty	9
3. King list of the 3 rd dynasty	11
4. King list of the 4 th dynasty	12
5. King list of the 5 th dynasty	13
6. King list of the 6 th dynasty	15

Introduction

The advent of writing marks the beginning of history, as opposed to prehistory. In Egypt, the boundary between the two is somewhat fluid: somewhere between 3000 and 2900 BC. In this same period, all of Egypt – from the Mediterranean in the north till the First Cataract in the south – was for the first time united under one king. This state of affairs – one nation under one king – would uninterruptedly last for some 800 years. It would produce the enormous pyramid complexes of Sakkara and Gizeh, thousands of stone mastabas, profound works of religious and philosophical literature, and uncounted objects of grace and elegance.

We would be hard pressed to identify, anywhere in human history, another period of continuous stability, for such a long time, over so vast a space, studded with such magnificent works of art and ingenuity. These people had something right.



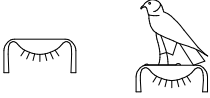
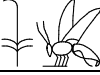

Modern Egyptologists subdivide this era into two periods: the Early Dynastic Period and the Old Kingdom. The Early Dynastic Period comprises the 1st and 2nd dynasty, the Old Kingdom the 3rd till 6th dynasty. The distinction between Early Dynastic and Old Kingdom is based on a perceived difference in maturity of the culture.

This period would end with a relatively short interval of chaos, after which regional powers would strive again for national dominance. The subsequent re-unification of the land marked the beginning of a new period of bloom: the Middle Kingdom.

* * * * *

In ancient Egypt, all of society revolved around the figure of the king. All works of the nation, big or small, were done by the king, or in his name. Events were dated to his regnal years. His name was considered a potent talisman, and it was therefore used to adorn jewelry, and even household utensils. Hence, in the archeological record, his name is everywhere. Being able to recognize these names is therefore an indispensable skill for anyone who wishes to find his way around in this culture.

The kings of Egypt had not just one name. They had a titulary: a string of names and epithets. Ultimately, the royal titulary consisted of 5 Great Names, each introduced by its own rubric. The following table gives these names and rubrics.

Name	Rubric		First Appearance
Horus name		The god Horus	Predynastic period
Nebty name ("Two Ladies name")		The goddesses Nekhbet & Wadjet	1 st dynasty
Gold name, later Golden Horus name		The gold-sign, later the god Horus over a gold-sign	1 st or 2 nd dynasty ¹
Throne name (sometimes still called Prenomen), the 1 st cartouche name		<i>nsw-bit</i> (Nesu-Bit) "King of Upper and Lower Egypt"	4 th dynasty ²
Birth name (sometimes called Nomen), the 2 nd cartouche name		<i>s3-r</i> (Sa Re) "Son of [the sun god] Re"	5 th dynasty ³

It was not before the Middle Kingdom, that all of these elements finally attained their classical format. In the period here covered, the titulary went through some really vigorous changes.

During the first 3 dynasties, the king's primary name was his Horus name. Starting with the 4th dynasty, the focus in the titulary suddenly shifted to a name, written inside a cartouche. This name is the "throne name" (sometimes still called the Prenomen). In the course of the 5th dynasty, a second cartouche name emerges. This is the birth name (or Nomen): the name with which the king was born. From the time of the 6th dynasty on, it became increasingly common to use both cartouche names together, especially on monuments. The decorative qualities of a pair of cartouches may have had something to do with this.

The rubrics that later became the standard introduction for the 2 cartouche names were Nesu Bit (conventionally translated as "King of Upper and Lower Egypt") and Sa Re ("Son of Re"). These rubrics were also subject to a process of evolution, but I will use them here starting with Neferirkare (the 3rd king of the 5th dynasty), to identify the throne name and the birth name, respectively. In the days of the 5th dynasty though, the titulary was never yet displayed in exactly this way.

We know the names of the kings from contemporary materials (inscriptions on monuments, texts on papyrus), but also from several king lists that were kept by the ancient Egyptians themselves. The most important of these are the following.

- The annals that were (re-)recorded during the 5th dynasty on a large slab of stone, of which only fragments now survive. The most important of these are the Palermo Stone, and a fragment now in Cairo, called K1.
- The king list in the Abydos mortuary temple of Seti I (19th dynasty). This is the only one that has come to us virtually intact.
- The king list on a New Kingdom papyrus, dating from the period of Ramesses II, now in the Turin Museum. Although only fragments of this papyrus remain, it pro-

¹ Depending on how we interpret the available evidence.

² Or possibly at the very end of the 3rd dynasty, under king Huny.

³ This refers to the first appearance of the birth name: not that of the title Sa Re which is present already during the 4th dynasty.

vides us with extremely valuable material – such as the duration of many individual reigns, as well as of several groups of reigns.

- And a king list in the tomb of a priest at Saqqara, also from the time of Ramesses II.

A special case is the history of Egypt that was written by the priest Manetho at the beginning of the Ptolemaic Period. Unfortunately, his original work has been lost, and it is now only available in a whole series of hopelessly corrupted copies-of-copies. It should really only be consulted as a last resort.

Although the archeological record doesn't show up any cartouche name before either Huny (last king of the 3rd dynasty) or Sneferu (first king of the 4th), the New Kingdom king lists present all royal names inside a cartouche – also for the first three dynasties. Historically this is not correct: it merely reflects the custom of the time in which these lists were drawn up. From the 4th dynasty onward, kings were almost exclusively alluded to by a cartouche name. But what is more important: the cartouche names on these lists differ substantially from the Horus names as known from contemporary sources. Therefore, linking them to the historically known kings is still a subject of some discussion.

Information about the duration of the individual reigns also comes from contemporary material, mostly in the form of dates. Many texts start with words like this: "Year so-and-so, under the Majesty of king X, (etc.).". These dates provide us with a minimum duration of a given reign. For the earliest dynasties, contemporary materials like these are however mostly lacking. Fortunately, the 5th dynasty Annals give details about every separate year. As only about 1/8th of the Annals is preserved, this information is not overwhelming though – but what we do have, seems authentic.

With Manetho, it is the complete reverse: from him we have the reigns of many kings – but his figures are most unreliable. In several cases where we have independent sources it can be shown that he added full tenners (10, 20 or even 30 years) to the duration of the actual reign – probably to "impress the peasants".

An important modern author about matters of chronology and the names of the Egyptian kings was Jürgen von Beckerath (1920-2016). He has summarized the results of his studies into two volumes:

- *Chronologie des pharaonischen Ägypten* (1997), and
- *Handbuch der ägyptischen Königsnamen* (1984-1999).

In *Chronologie*, he calculates – going backwards in time, starting with the year 332 BC – both the duration and the dating of each reign. There is now enough material available to reach a fair degree of accuracy in this area until the beginning of the Middle Kingdom (11th dynasty, around 2000 BC). For the period before this (including all of the time covered in this article), the uncertainty is *at least* 50 years. This means that any date must be considered as meaning: plus or minus 25 years. Under those circumstances, it does not make much sense to give "exact" dates for the beginning and end of individual reigns.

For dating the dynasties, I will follow Von Beckerath's most conservative (= least old) estimates.⁴ For individual kings, I will only give his estimate for the duration of the reign, without pinpointing dates. In a few cases, where I disagree with him on the order of kings, I will give a total for a group of reigns.

The following table gives an overview, to give you an appreciation of the timeframe we are dealing with.

⁴ I have deducted 2 years from the duration of the 6th dynasty though: see page 16.

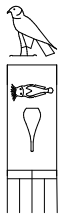


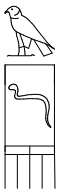

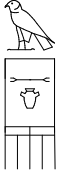
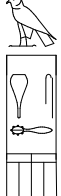

Dynasty	Number of kings	Period acc. to Von Beckerath	Number of years	Average years per reign
1	8	2982-2803	179	22,4
2	9	2803-2657	146	16,2
3	5	2657-2589	68	13,6
4	7	2589-2454	135	19,3
5	9	2454-2297	157	17,4
6	6	2297-2168	129	21,5
Total	44	2982-2168	814	18,5

(Calculating the average duration of the reigns is a fine check for the plausibility of a given solution.) This is more or less what we would expect. If these kings in average came to the throne at age 20-40, they would have died age 40-60. A picture like this can however only be expected under politically stable conditions: murders and warfare are just terrible for a king's life expectancy. Precisely this period though, of eight whole centuries in a row, was characterized by a remarkable stability. It may in fact have been the longest period of uninterrupted peace for any civilized nation, ever.

Although I disagree on some minor points with Von Beckerath, I mostly follow his lead. I wholeheartedly recommend the two works of his mentioned before.

1. King list of the 1st dynasty

These are the Horus names of the kings of the 1st dynasty.

1	2	3	4
			
<i>n^cr-mr</i> Narmer	<i>h3</i> Aha ⁵	<i>dr</i> Djer	<i>dt</i> Djet
5	6	7	8
			
<i>dn</i> Den	<i>d-ib</i> Adjib	<i>smr-ht</i> Semerkhet	<i>k3-c</i> Qaa

(The “funny lettering” right under the hieroglyphs is called a transliteration. It is a scientific notation of the consonants that together form the “skeleton” of the original words. Below the transliteration comes a more pronounceable version of the same.)

On account of the archeological evidence, the order in which these kings once ruled is clear. Minor remaining uncertainties are the following.

- Perhaps the mother of king Den, queen Merneith, ruled for a short period as queen-mother before Den.
- There is still some disagreement about the identification of Menes, who is mentioned on the New Kingdom king lists as the first king of the 1st dynasty. According to some (including Von Beckerath), not Narmer but Aha was Menes. This would mean that Aha has to move one position up in the king list, and that there is a vacancy between him and Djer (see also footnote 6 below).

⁵ Also referred to as Hor-Aha.

So, the 1st dynasty consisted of 8 kings, and it ruled for 179 years: ca. 2982 till ca. 2803 BC.

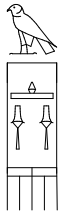

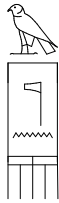

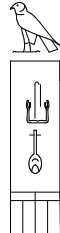
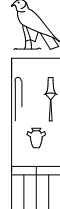
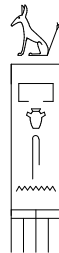
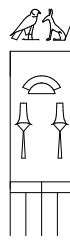
King	Years	Tomb
1. Narmer	} 33 ⁶	All tombs: Abydos, Umm el-Qaab
2. Aha		
3. Djer	47	
4. Djet	13	
5. Den	47	
6. Adjib	6	
7. Semerkhet	8	
8. Qaa	25	
Total	179	

⁶ According to Von Beckerath, the first king of the 1st dynasty was Aha with 32 years, followed by an otherwise unknown king that ruled for 1 year. I reject this option on account of the evidence from contemporary sealings, which show complete king lists from this period. These lists have no additional name between Aha and Djer. As the total number of regnal years for the 1st dynasty is dictated by the reconstruction of the 5th dynasty Annals, the total of 33 years should be distributed over Narmer and Aha.

2. King list of the 2nd dynasty

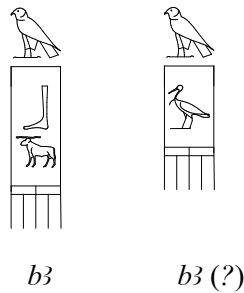
Concerning the 2nd dynasty, there are many more uncertainties than about the 1st. Of the 4th king of this dynasty, we are only certain about his Nebty name: Weneg. Of the 5th, we know neither his Horus, nor his Nebty name: we just have his cartouche name on the New Kingdom king lists: Sened. (As this is not a contemporary name, it is not included in the table below).

The 8th king of this dynasty replaced the usual image of Horus above his name by that of the animal associated with the god Seth: brother to Horus, but also his eternal opponent. The last king of this group put both Horus *and* Seth above his name, apparently as a gesture of reconciliation.

1	2	3	4	5
				
<i>ḥtp-sḥmwy</i> Hetep- sekhemwy	<i>nb-rꜥ</i> Nebre	<i>ni-ntr</i> Ninetjer	<i>wng</i> Weneg	(Sened)
6	7	8	9	
				
<i>snfr-k3</i> Sneferka	<i>šḥm-ib</i> Sekhemib	<i>pr-ib.sn</i> Peribsen	<i>ḥꜥ-sḥmwy</i> Khase- khemwy	

The order of the first three kings is fairly certain. That of the last three kings is arguable, but not certain. For the middle section of three kings though, we are really in a thicket – mostly because their tombs are not discovered yet. There are some grounds for assuming the Horus name of king # 6 to be Sneferka. But we have no

idea how to allocate the following two Horus names over the numbers 4 and 5:



It is not even certain, that these are really two different names...

For the first 3 kings, two tombs have been found at Saqqara, near the Step Pyramid. The tombs of Peribsen and Khasekhemwy are at Abydos, next to the 1st dynasty royal tombs. The remaining tombs are suspected at Saqqara, perhaps under the so-called “western massifs” of Djoser’s Step Pyramid complex.

We may then summarize as follows. The 2nd dynasty consisted of 9 kings, and it ruled for 146 years: ca. 2803 till ca. 2657 BC.






King	Years	Tomb
1. Hetepsekhemwy	28	} Saqqara (only 1 tomb found, with both names)
2. Nebre	15	
3. Ninetjer	43	Saqqara
4. Weneg ⁷	7	??
5. Sened ⁸	} 26	??
6. Sneferka		??
7. Sekhemib		??
8. Peribsen		Abydos, Umm el-Qaab
9. Khasekhemwy	27	Abydos, Umm el-Qaab
Total	146	

⁷ Nebty name.

⁸ Cartouche name in the New Kingdom king lists.

3. King list of the 3rd dynasty

This is the list of Horus names of the 3rd dynasty:

1	2	3	4	5
				
<i>z3-nḥt</i> Sanakht	<i>ntry-ḥt</i> Netjerykhet	<i>šm-ḥt</i> Sekhemkhet	<i>ḥꜥ-b3</i> Khaba	<i>k3-ḥdt</i> Qahedjet

The 2nd king of this dynasty is better known under the name that he has in the New Kingdom king lists: Djoser.

Likewise, Qahedjet is better known as king Huny.


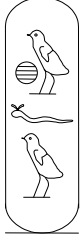
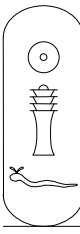
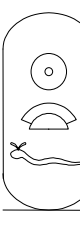

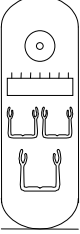
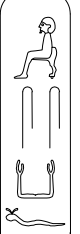
The 3rd dynasty consisted of 5 kings. It ruled for 68 years: ca. 2657 till ca. 2589 BC.

King	Years	Tomb
1. Sanakht	17	??
2. Netjerykhet / Djoser	20	Step Pyramid, Saqqara
3. Sekhemkhet	7	Unfinished step pyramid, Saqqara
4. Khaba	} 24	Layer Pyramid, Zawiyet el-Aryan
5. Qahedjet / Huny		Pyramid of Meidum (?)
Total	68	

Here ends the Horus Era: the period in which the kings of Egypt were primarily known by their Horus name.

4. King list of the 4th dynasty

With the 4th dynasty, the royal titlature changes drastically. Quite suddenly, a new type of name surfaces, and it immediately assumes first rank: the cartouche name. During the 4th dynasty, each king still had just one cartouche name. It was not before the 3rd king of the 5th dynasty, that a second cartouche name made its first appearance.

1	2	3	4
			
<i>snfrw</i> Sneferu	<i>hw.f-w</i> Cheops	<i>dd.f-r</i> Djedefre	<i>hw.f-r</i> Chefred
5	6	7	
			
<i>b3-k3 (?)</i> Baka (?) ⁹	<i>mn-k3w-r</i> Mykerinos	<i>šps-s-k3.f</i> Shepseskaf	

The 4th dynasty consisted of 7 kings, ruling for 135 years: ca. 2589 till ca. 2454 BC.

King	Years	Tomb
1. Sneferu	35	The Bent Pyramid } both at The Red Pyramid } Dashur
2. Cheops	23	The Great Pyramid of Gizeh
3. Djedefre	9	An unfinished pyramid at Abu Rawasj
4. Chefred	26	The 2 nd pyramid of Gizeh
5. Baka	7	An unfinished pyramid at Zawjet el Arjan
6. Mykerinos	28	The 3 rd pyramid of Gizeh
7. Shepseskaf	7 ¹⁰	A sarcophagus-like tomb at Saqqara
Total	135	

⁹ This name is only known from markings at his unfinished pyramid. Its reading is uncertain.

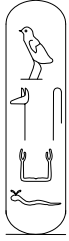
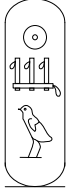
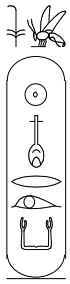
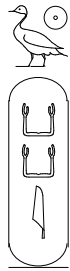
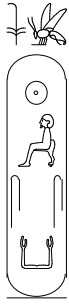
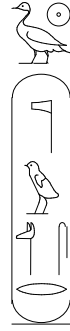
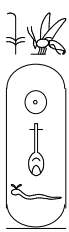



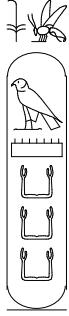
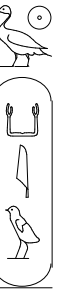
¹⁰ Von Beckerath gives 5 years for Shepseskaf, and 2 more for an unknown king "Thamphthys", only mentioned by Manetho. In my opinion, Manetho as a source is not credible on its own, without any corroboration. To preserve the number of years for this dynasty, I have added these 2 years to Shepseskaf.

5. King list of the 5th dynasty

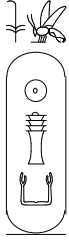

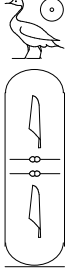
The first two kings of the 5th dynasty had, like their predecessors of the 4th, just one cartouche name. Starting with king Neferirkare however, we see the gradual, at first still hesitant emergence of a second cartouche name: the birth name. Thus far, the kings of Egypt were only known by names they received at the moment of their coronation. Giving them a set of new names at that occasion served to stress their transition into a new existence: into a new life as a god. But now, the name they received from their parents at birth was finally deemed worthy enough to be included in the titulary.

I will, starting with Neferirkare, give both cartouche names for each king – and in the order that the Egyptians themselves respected: first the so-called throne name (introduced by the phrase “king of Upper and Lower Egypt”), and then the birth name (following on the title “Son of Re”).

These first kings with two cartouche names are today best known by their throne name. From the 6th dynasty onwards, we mostly use their birth name – unlike the Egyptians themselves, for whom the throne name was always more important.¹¹

1	2	3	4
		 	 
<i>wsr-k3.f</i> Userkaf	<i>s3hw-r</i> Sahure	<i>nfr-ir-k3-r</i> Neferirkare <i>k3k3i</i> Kakai	<i>šps-k3-r</i> Shepseskare <i>ntr-wsr</i> Netjerweser
5	6	7	
 	 	 	
<i>nfr.f-r</i> Neferefre <i>izi</i> Izi	<i>ni-wsr-r</i> Niuserre <i>ini</i> Ini	<i>mn-k3w-ḥr</i> Menkawhor <i>ik3w</i> Ikaw	

¹¹ There are several reasons why we do not follow the usage of the Egyptians. One is, that Manetho didn't. His use of birth names instead of throne names was a break with tradition, but his writings reached Europe well before Champollion re-deciphered the hieroglyphs. It further agrees better with the European way of dealing with king's names: being accustomed to Louis I till XVIII, we can manage Ramesses I till XI real easy.


8	9	
 <i>dd-k3-r</i> Djedkare	 <i>wnis</i> Unas	
 <i>izzi</i> Izezi		

All of a sudden, the last king of this dynasty reverted again to using only one cartouche name. But unlike the 4th and early 5th dynasty kings, Unas only used his *birth name*. With Unas (and his 6th dynasty successor Teti), the emancipation of the birth name temporarily overshoots.

Unas is also the first to have the Pyramid Texts carved inside his pyramid.

The kings of the 5th dynasty were unique in the sense that the first 7 of them build a personal sun temple, connected to their funerary cult. Although we are aware of the names of all 7, only 2 have actually been located.

The 5th dynasty consisted of 9 kings. It ruled for 157 years: ca. 2454 till ca. 2297 BC.

King	Years	Tomb	Sun temple
1. Userkaf	8	Saqqara	Abu Sir
2. Sahure	13	 Seriously ruined pyramids at Abu Sir	??
3. Neferirkare	20		??
4. Shepseskare	7		??
5. Neferefre	11		??
6. Niuserre	31		Abu Gorab
7. Menkawhor	9	??	??
8. Djedkare	38	Saqqara	(none)
9. Unas	20	Saqqara (with Pyramid Texts)	(none)
Total	157		

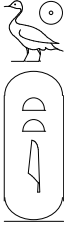


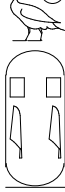
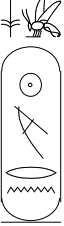

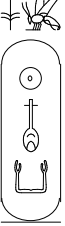



6. King list of the 6th dynasty

Just when we thought that we were finally getting on really secure ground, we encounter some problems again in the 6th dynasty.

Like Unas of the 5th dynasty, Teti only used one cartouche name. And again, like Unas, we possess more than enough material from this king (a/o a pyramid inscribed with the Pyramid Texts) to be positive that he really used only one cartouche.

Of his successor, we can not be so sure. He also has left us only one cartouche name – Userkare – but we can only surmise that this was a throne name, and that he also used a birth name. All that has survived of him are two sealings, and his name on the Abydos king list. In the Turin list, the line where he should have been mentioned is lost.

The 6th and last king of this dynasty is even more shadowy. As is the case with Userkare, he does appear on the Abydos list, while on the Turin list, his name is lost. However, right behind the position where his name is suspected, the words “1 year 1 month” are still visible on the papyrus, suggesting a very brief reign indeed. The only contemporary occurrence of his name is as crown prince under his father Pepy II. This king is sometimes called Nemti-emsaf II, and sometimes Merenre II – which points to a most unusual peculiarity: both his birth name *and* his throne name are identical to that of Merenre.

1	2	3
 <i>tṭi</i> Teti	 <i>wsr-k3-rʿ</i> Userkare	<div>   </div> <i>mry-rʿ</i> <i>ppy</i> Meryre Pepy (I)
4	5	6
<div>   </div> <i>mr.n-rʿ</i> <i>nmti-m-z3.f</i> Merenre (I) Nemti-emsaf (I)	<div>   </div> <i>nfr-k3-rʿ</i> <i>ppy</i> Neferkare Pepy (II)	<div>   </div> <i>mr.n-rʿ</i> <i>nmti-m-z3.f</i> Merenre (II) Nemti-emsaf (II) ¹²

¹² The title Sa Re is not actually attested with this name. It is here only used to identify the birth name.

The throne name of Nemti-emsaf II here reproduced is from the Abydos king list. This cartouche actually contains both his throne name – Merenre – *and* his birth name – Nemti-emsaf.¹³ The scribe (or the sculptor) made an error in picking the wrong bird to write the latter name with, and he used another hieroglyph for the sound *s3* – but essentially, it is the same name as that of Nemti-emsaf I.

After Nemti-emsaf II, the Turin papyrus mentions the following name:

 *nt-ikrty* Neith-iqerty

A name beginning with (the goddess) Neith has to belong to a woman. Manetho mentions at this point a queen Nitokris – but the Turin papyrus (or a copy of it) may have been his source in the first place. The only credible mention of this name is therefore the Turin king list. The next name on that list is that of Neferkare-Pepysenb: a king in the later part of the 8th dynasty.¹⁴ The Turin list does not mark a divide between the 6th and the 8th dynasty, so it gives no indication whether we should regard Neith-iqerty as either the last of the 6th dynasty, or the 1st (or 2nd, 3rd or whatever) of the 8th dynasty. Perhaps the Turin scribe was even mentioning this queen as the only interesting / worthwhile / known ruler of the elusive 7th dynasty... In any event, as no further information about her is available, I find it more prudent not to include her in the king list of the 6th dynasty. As a consequence, I have allotted the 2 years that Von Beckerath credits her with to the First Intermediate Period.

All in all, it makes a picture of a dynasty in decline: after the long reign of Pepy II, things were falling apart. Manetho credits Pepy II with a reign of no less than 90 (!) years. There is little doubt that he came to the throne as a young child: a touching letter of the boy-king has survived on the walls of the tomb of one of his courtiers (Harkhuf). Still: 90 years is really excessive. In hieratic, the whole difference between “60” and “90” is just one stroke, so at some point, a copying scribe may well have interpreted a crease in the papyrus as such a stroke. I will therefore follow Von Beckerath here in his more conservative estimate of 60 years.

The 6th dynasty consisted then of 6 kings, and ruled for 129 years: ca. 2297 till ca. 2168 BC.

King	Years	Tomb
1. Teti	10	Saqqara (with Pyramid Texts)
2. Userkare	2	??
3. Pepy I	50	Saqqara (with Pyramid Texts)
4. Merenre – Nemti-emsaf I	6	Saqqara (with Pyramid Texts)
5. Pepy II	60	Saqqara (with Pyramid Texts)
6. Merenre – Nemti-emsaf II	1	??
Total	129	

This is, where the first great epoch of ancient Egyptian history ends. After this, the country quickly slid, first into chaos, then into mediocrity. It would take a century and a half before Mentuhotep II could reunite Egypt, thereby inaugurating its next period of political stability and cultural bloom: the Middle Kingdom.

¹³ Odd combinations like this are not uncommon in the period before the Middle Kingdom.

¹⁴ See table 7 on page 149 of *Chronologie* for an excellent overview of this period.