

## **The Old Kingdom 2686 to 2181 B.C.E**

Based on Egyptian legend, in the beginning the Egyptians' land was comprised of many populated areas were governed by tribal “chieftains.” Early during the first Dynastic Period, Upper and Lower Egypt were united by King Menes around 3100 B.C.E. Menes wore a “Double Crown” to signify the White Crown of Upper Egypt and the Red Crown of Lower Egypt. The Nile brought Upper and Lower Egypt together physically and Menes brought them together politically.

The Old Kingdom lasted from 2686 to 2181 B.C.E, which included the third through sixth dynasties. The capital of the Old Kingdom was located in Memphis. With the Old Kingdom came prosperity and glory as shown through the massive creation of the greatest and largest pyramids in Egyptian history.

During this time, the Egyptian kings were referred to as gods. Despite the infinite amount of power Egyptian kings possessed, it was their job to uphold fundamental order and harmony. The kings were supposed to rule based on principles such as truth, justice, order and harmony.

The first king of the Old Kingdom was Djoser (2691 and 2625 BC). He ruled for nearly 19 years and was the most famous king during his time period. His greatest success was the establishment of the building of the Step Pyramid at Saqqara and the temple complex surrounding it. It was the first monumental building made of stone. The Step Pyramid led to so much of Djoser’s fame during his rule and that is why his name is well known today.

Egypt was divided into a total of 42 provinces. There were twenty-two provinces in Upper Egypt and twenty in Lower Egypt. Each province was headed by a governor who tried to build up power within his own province.

The pharaohs of the 6th dynasty ended up losing control of the kingdom and after the 6th dynasty it became known as a “dark period.” Egypt became divided and both sides could not seem to come to an agreement. This period lasted about 100 years and covered the 7th, 8th, 9th and 10th dynasties. It wasn’t until the 11th dynasty that Egypt was again united and the Middle Kingdom began.

## **The Middle Kingdom 2055 to 1650 B.C.E.**

While the First Intermediate Period took place, new powers began to emerge sparking rival dynasties between Heracleopolis (Lower Egypt) and Thebes (Upper Egypt). Not long after the rivalry began, the King of Thebes, Mentuhotep, defeated the ruler of Heracleopolis and reunited all of Egypt under one rule. This began the Middle Kingdom and a new period of stability, which lasted from 2055 to 1650 B.C.E.

The Middle Kingdom has been labeled by historians as a the Golden Age due to the economic, social and political stability of the time period. Trading, arts and literature all flourished in the Middle Kingdom. Nubia became the main trading spot along the Nile, which served as a means of transportation for, ivory, ebony, leopard skins and ostrich plumes. The Nubians were able to exchange their commodities and their slaves for manufactured goods and weapons.

Each province, also referred to as a nome, was essentially an independent city-state governed by a Nomarch. Duties of the Nomarchs included collecting taxes and recruitment of labor forces for royal projects.

A noticeable difference between the Old and Middle Kingdom was that of the view of the Pharaohs. In the Old Kingdom the pharaoh had been viewed as an inaccessible god-king, while now he was shown as the “shepherd of his people” charged with the task of building public works and producing for the welfare of Egyptians.

Instead of building pyramids as Egyptians did in the Old Kingdom, when pharaohs died they were placed and buried in hidden tombs. Their tombs were buried all over Egypt making it difficult for intruders to find and steal.

One Pharaoh explained:

“He (a particular god) created me as one who should do that which he is done, and to carry out that which he commanded should be done. He appointed me herdsman of this land, for he knew who would keep it in order for him.”

Throughout the Old and Middle Kingdoms Egyptian society was organized along hierarchical lines with the god-king at the top. The king had his nobles and priests around him as well as much of the upper class. The upper class held jobs such as merchants and artisans while the lower class were serfs who worked on the lands as well as the majority of people within the society.

## **The New Kingdom c.1550-1070**

After another brief Intermediate Period, Pharaoh Ahmose I founded the 18th Dynasty and established the New Kingdom (c.1550-1070). Ahmose immediately steered the Egyptians onto a new militant and imperialistic path. A more formal army was developed and military commanders were appointed. It wasn't long before Egypt, during the period of the New Kingdom, became the most powerful state in the Near East. Over the years Egypt continued to expand its territory through military conquest.

During c.1412-1375 B.C.E., the Egyptian imperial state reached its height under rule of Amenhotep III. The empire's reconstructions were evident through magnificent new buildings and temples. It seemed that shortly after Amenhotep III's reign came to end, so did the New Kingdom. There became a great religious upheaval in Egypt that began to cause the kingdom all sorts of problems.

After Amenhotep III died, his son Amenhotep IV took over and attempted to bring religious change to the Empire. This attempt failed drastically. Egyptians had no interest in ignoring their own traditional ways and beliefs and therefore conflict arose. More problems began to service within the empire and it was clear the end was in sight. Eventually the days of the Egyptian empire ended and the New Kingdom died with the twentieth dynasty in 1070 B.C.E. Attempts to regain the empire appeared here and there but never amounted to anything. For many years after, Egypt was dominated by Libyans, Nubians, Assyrians, Persians and Macedonians.