

Early Civilizations in Ancient Egypt (3100 B.C.-1600 B.C.)

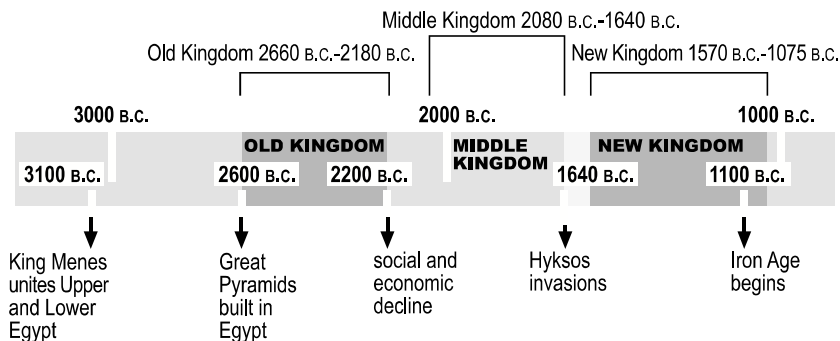
River Valley Civilization

New Stone Age people living along the Nile had learned to farm crops and raise cattle. From this beginning, one of the world's first great **civilizations** developed. Egypt, also known as the *gift of the Nile*, was one of the greatest cultural centers the world has ever seen. The advanced multicultural Egyptian civilization lasted almost 3,100 years. Many of their monuments and ideas are with us today.

Egypt has a very dry climate. Nine-tenths of the land is desert. Almost the entire population lives along the Nile River where the land is fertile.

Egypt was divided into two regions: Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt. Around 3100 B.C., a king named Menes united the two regions. The Kingdom created by Menes lasted long after his death. The double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt passed from father to son for many years. The period called the *Old Kingdom* lasted roughly from 2660 B.C. to 2180 B.C. During this time, the first **pyramids** were built as tombs for **pharaohs**. **Scribes** started to keep records of events. Cities grew and people began to use metal for many different things.

Timeline of Ancient Egypt

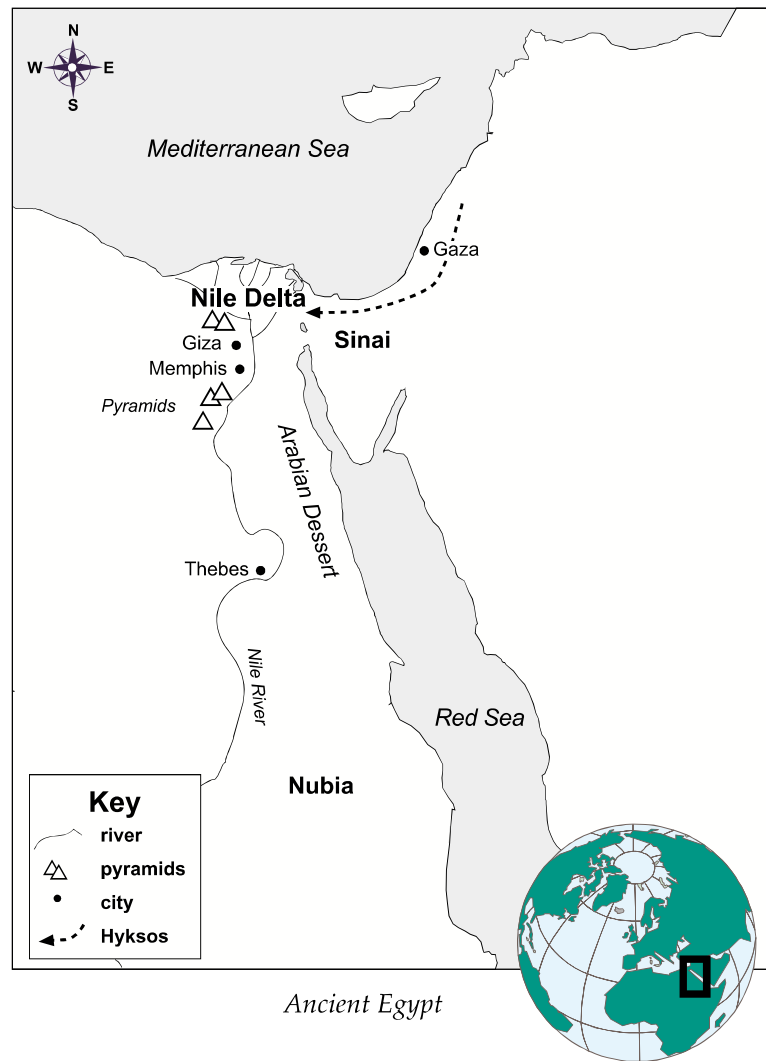


The Egyptians were one of the first peoples to establish a system of **government** and social order. The government during the Old Kingdom eventually grew corrupt. Local leaders fought among themselves for power and wealth. Civil war ended the Old Kingdom. The decline lasted about 100 years.

The next group of kings who ruled Egypt established the Middle Kingdom. The new pharaohs made Egypt strong and prosperous. During

this period, from about 2080 B.C. to 1640 B.C., life improved but corruption remained. Conditions were ripe for invasion. Conflicts between kings, priests, and nobles made Egypt weak.

About 1640 B.C., Egypt was invaded by tribes from the northeast known as *Hyksos*. The Hyksos treated the people cruelly. About 70 years of foreign rule was enough for the Egyptians. Around 1570 B.C., Egyptians threw out the invaders.



Driving out the Hyksos marked the beginning of the New Kingdom. This was a great period for Egypt. An **empire** was established when Egypt invaded and conquered neighboring territories. Egyptian rule extended far beyond the Nile River Valley into Western Asia. Trade between Egypt and its empire grew. As a result, much wealth flowed into Egypt. Huge temples and monuments were built.

Life in Ancient Egypt

At first, most people in Egypt lived in small towns along the Nile River. A few **urban** centers emerged, however, when Egypt was united. The largest urban centers were Thebes, Memphis, and Heliopolis, major seats of government, culture, and religion.

One of the first systems of law was developed in ancient Egypt. Law in ancient Egypt was stern. Punishments even for minor crimes could include being whipped, tortured, thrown to crocodiles, or sent to labor camps. The common man was little more than a laborer for the privileged classes of priests, landlords, and military leaders.

Egyptian Society



an Egyptian king

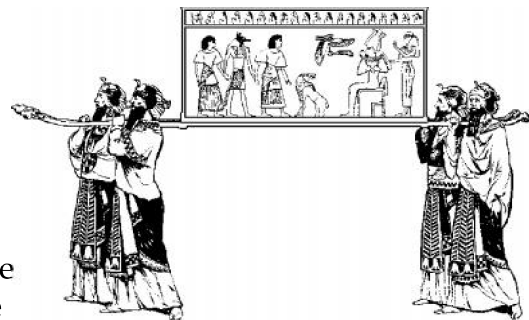
Egyptian society was made up of many social groups. Common people paid huge sums of money in taxes to support the government. Socially, a very small minority were among the privileged classes. These included the priests, landlords, government officials, and military leaders.

Probably more than 99 percent of the people were poor. They enjoyed few privileges. They lived and died for one purpose—to work to support the country.

The Egyptian king was called the pharaoh. Pharaoh means *Great House*. The pharaoh was the most powerful person in Egypt. He held all of the authority. The people believed that the pharaohs were descended from the gods and ruled as their representative. Many of these rulers were just or fair. Appointed officials assisted the pharaoh in ruling the large kingdom.

The kings or pharaohs owned all the land. Landlords ran the farms; therefore, they had great power in each village. Egyptian priests also had a great deal of authority.

The people who held great power were government and military officials. The government officials collected taxes and



an Egyptian procession

checked on government projects. Scribes were given the task of keeping records for the government. They also kept records for the temples. Some of the people were tradesmen. They traveled up and down the Nile trading goods produced in each village. To trade goods without using money is called **barter**.



Queen Nefertiti was the wife of the pharaoh Akhenaton; he ruled Egypt from 1375 to 1358 B.C.

The vast majority of Egyptians were peasants. Peasants are usually described as members of the lower class. The peasants farmed the land along the Nile River.

Women in ancient Egypt could own property and could decide who should get it when they died. However, women in the royal family sometimes had to marry relatives. (For instance, the pharaoh had to marry someone who was his equal and would therefore sometimes have to marry a relative.)

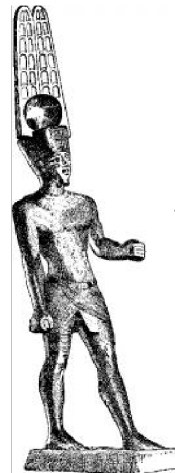
Importance of the Nile River

The world's longest river, the Nile, flows north for about 4,000 miles. The Nile River was and still is the backbone of Egypt. It provided water, fertile land, and a transportation system. It also caused great problems. Each year around April, the Nile began to flood. Floods reached a peak in July and were usually over by October.

While flooding killed many people, ruined farmland, and destroyed homes, the Egyptians learned to cope with it. They quickly realized that the floodwaters of the Nile left a layer of very fertile topsoil. Topsoil is very important for productive farming. The Egyptians also learned that by digging canals and draining swamps, they could preserve their precious land.

Egyptian Religion

Ancient Egyptians believed in many gods. They were also led to believe that the pharaoh was like a god. Symbols and figures represented the gods. People believed that everything which affected their lives was a result of the gods' action. The sun god, Re, and the goddess of nature and motherhood, Isis, were the most powerful gods.



Amon was the god of air, wind, and the breath of life. Huge temples were dedicated to him.

The Egyptians' religion included a belief in life after death. They learned to preserve dead bodies through **embalming** so that they would be ready for the next life. The preserved body was known as a **mummy**. Some mummies, like that of Tutankhamen (King Tut), can be seen today. Some historians believe that mummies remained well preserved over the centuries because of Egypt's exceptionally dry climate.



King Tutankhamen

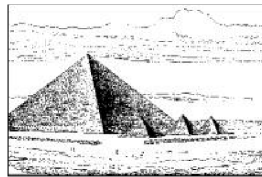
The pharaohs built large, four-sided tombs called *pyramids* to protect the mummies. Along with the mummified body, many possessions were placed inside the tombs of the pyramids. This was done to please the gods and make life after death as comfortable as possible. About 80 pyramids were built in the valley of Giza. The largest pyramid, called the *Great Pyramid*, was built by Khufu, a pharaoh of the Old Kingdom.

The Great Pyramid

The Great Pyramid at Giza is considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Locate Giza on the map of ancient Egypt on page 34.

All of the work on the Great Pyramid was done by human labor using only the crudest of tools. The stone used for the tomb chamber inside the pyramid came from 700 miles away.

Men cut the rocks, formed them into blocks, brought them by boat up the Nile, probably dragged them across the desert, and used ramps to put them in the correct position on the pyramid.



- ▲ the base has almost perfect right angles
- ▲ the Great Pyramid is almost 500 feet high (50 stories)
- ▲ took 20 years to build
- ▲ occupies 13 acres at its base
- ▲ built for Cheops, a pharaoh
- ▲ 100,000 people worked on it, and many died
- ▲ 755 feet long on each side
- ▲ two sides vary in length by only one inch
- ▲ built with several million blocks averaging two tons each, with the largest blocks weighing 15 tons

Egyptian Contributions to Civilization

Architecture, Engineering, Mathematics, and Science

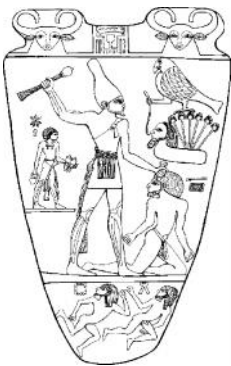
During the periods of the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms—a span of almost 2,000 years—the Egyptian civilization produced a great deal for future generations. Some of these **achievements** included great **architecture** and engineering feats, such as the pyramids and the Sphinx, and the use of mathematics, particularly geometry. Egyptian doctors studied the human body, diseases, and performed surgery. Egyptian scientists studied the stars and learned to measure time. The Egyptians also created a calendar system much like the one used today. Written records of the discoveries were kept. They devised a kind of writing called **hieroglyphics**. In hieroglyphics, pictures or symbols stood for words. They also developed a kind of paper called **papyrus**, named for the plant it was made from. Our word *paper* comes from the Egyptian word *papyrus*.



The pyramids are guarded by the Sphinx, a huge figure with a man's head and a lion's body.

Other Early Civilizations

Around the same time that the Egyptian civilization was flourishing in the Nile River Valley, other river valleys around the world were developing civilizations as well. These were as follows: Nile River—Egypt; Tigris and Euphrates—Mesopotamia River Valley or Fertile Crescent; Indus River Valley—India; Yellow River Valley or Huang He River Valley—China; and Niger River Valley—Africa. Two early civilizations, Japan and Amerindian, did not develop along river valleys. Locate all of these areas on the world map on the following page.

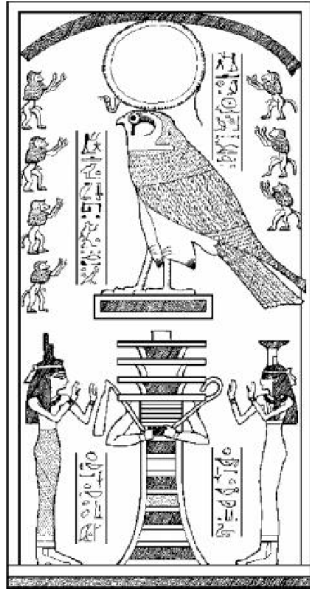


Egyptian victory panel

It is important to realize that each of the early civilizations developed and achieved greatness in self-contained geographical areas. That is, all were surrounded by natural barriers such as deserts, mountains, and oceans. Learn more about these civilizations by referring to the chart on page 48.

Review

Ancient Egypt was one of the first great civilizations. It developed along the Nile River, which provided fertile lands for crops and a means of



an Egyptian book of the dead

transportation. At first, there were two separate regions, Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt, but around 3100 B.C., a leader named Menes united them. This period of unification of the two kingdoms marked the start of the period called the Old Kingdom, which lasted from about 2660 B.C. to 2180 B.C.

Although the Egyptians established one of the world's first governments during the Old Kingdom, this government eventually grew corrupt. During the 400 years of the Middle Kingdom, life improved but the government continued to be corrupt. This corruption weakened Egypt, and the kingdom was invaded about 1640 B.C. by tribes from the northeast called the Hyksos.

The New Kingdom was established when the Egyptians threw out the invaders around 1570 B.C. During the time of the New Kingdom, the Egyptian empire grew by conquering nearby territory. This was a time of great strength and wealth for Egypt. The kings of Egypt began to call themselves pharaohs, meaning Great House, during the New Kingdom.

Egyptian society consisted of a small minority of privileged people and a great number of poor peasants. The privileged people were the king or pharaoh, priests, landlords, and government and military officials. The privileged people had all the power, while the peasants had none.

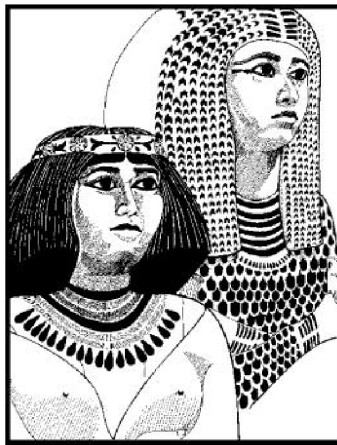
Seven Wonders of the World

1. The Pyramids of Egypt
2. The Hanging Gardens of Babylon
3. The Statue of Zeus (Jupiter) at Olympia
4. The Colossus of Rhodes
5. The Temple of Artemis (Diana) at Ephesus
6. The Mausoleum at Halicarnassus (Turkey)
7. The Pharos (Lighthouse) of Alexandria

The seven greatest structures of the ancient world, as listed by Greek scholars. The oldest wonder (and the only survivor) are the Pyramids of Egypt.

The accomplishments of the Egyptians were many. They designed and built great works of architecture, such as the pyramids, using advanced mathematics. They developed a system of writing called hieroglyphics, and a kind of paper called papyrus. The Egyptians even discovered how to preserve dead bodies through embalming.

Egypt was just one of several civilizations to develop along a river valley. Other river valleys, such as the Tigris-Euphrates, and the Indus River Valleys, supported early civilizations as well.



Egyptian queen and king



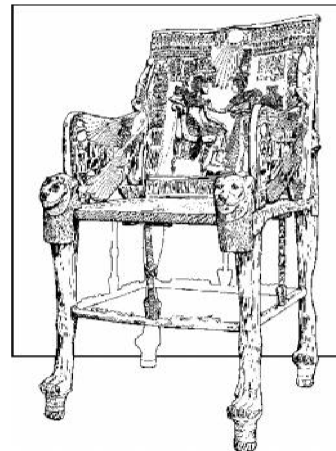
Egyptian necklace



Egyptian god Thoth



Egyptian pharaoh Ramses the Great



pharaoh Tutankhamen's throne