

pharaoh a ruler of ancient Egypt

1. Ancient Egypt and Its Rulers

Ancient Egypt enjoyed three long periods of stability and unity under the rule of **pharaohs**. Historians call these periods the Old Kingdom, the Middle Kingdom, and the New Kingdom.

The Old Kingdom lasted from about 2700 to 2200 B.C.E. During this time, early pharaohs set up a strong central government. They also had great pyramids built as tombs for themselves. Some historians call this time the Age of the Pyramids.

The Middle Kingdom (about 2000 to 1800 B.C.E.) is sometimes called the Period of Reunification because it followed years of chaos and disunity. During this era, Egyptians enjoyed many great achievements in literature, art, and architecture.

The New Kingdom (about 1600 to 1100 B.C.E.) is often called Egypt's Golden Age. During this time of peace and stability,

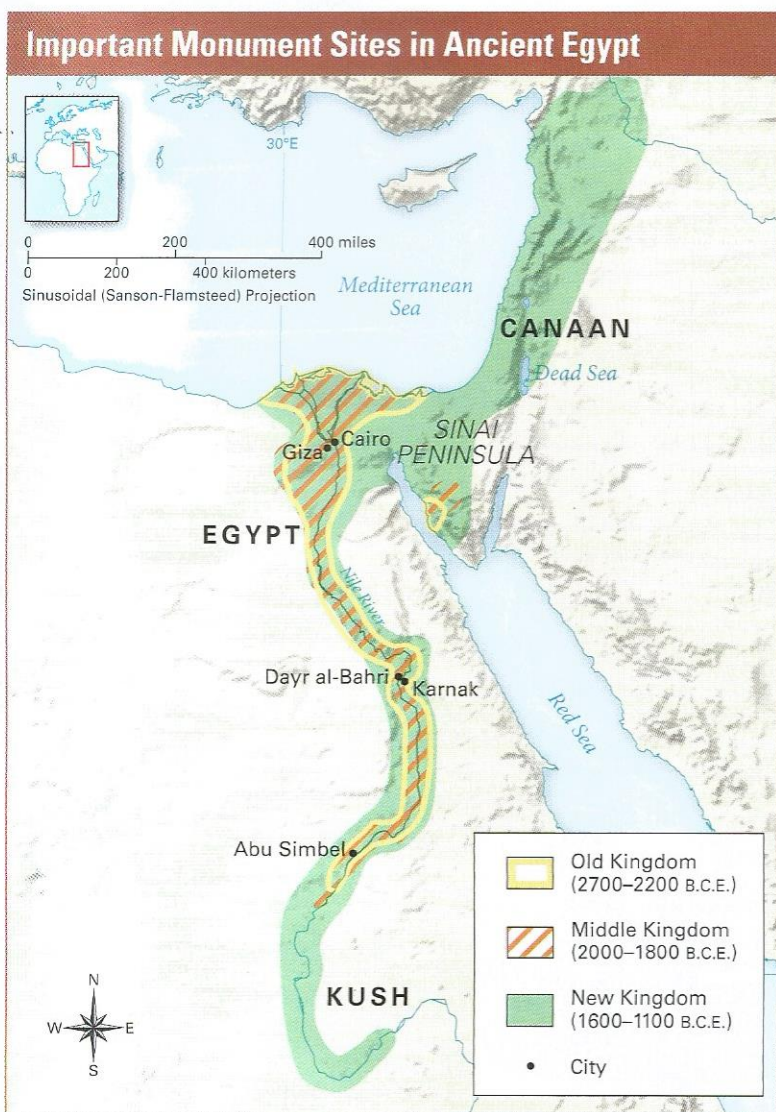
ancient Egypt's power reached its height. Pharaohs increased trade and had massive monuments built. Rulers, like Thutmose III, expanded the empire far up the Nile River into modern-day Sudan and into the Levant, which is the coastal region at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea.

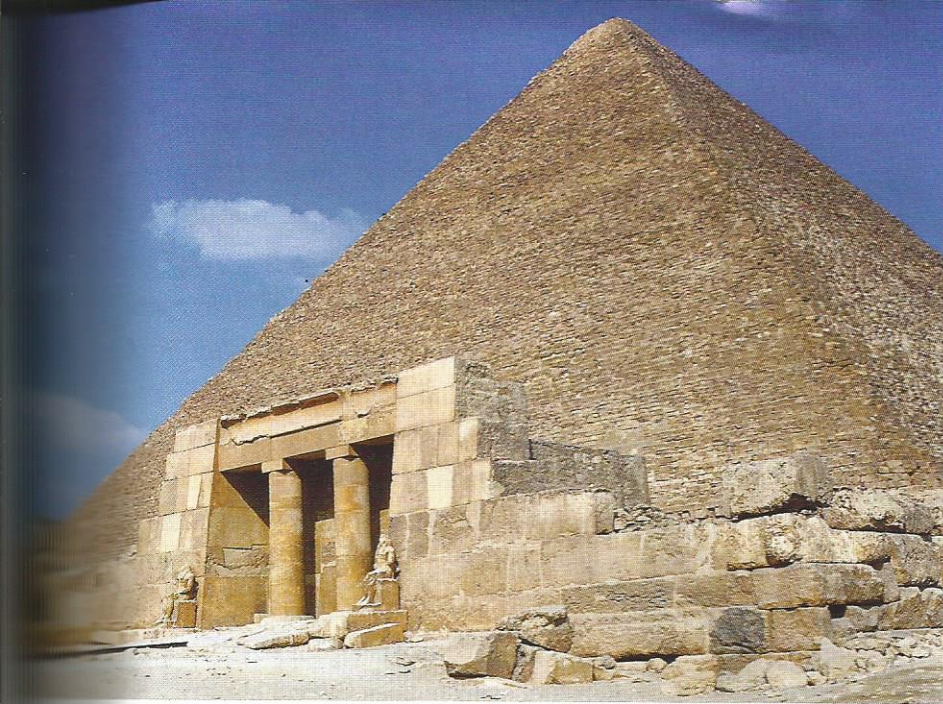
As in Mesopotamia, religion played a central role in Egypt's social and political order. Pharaohs were believed to be gods. They owned all the land and were responsible for their people's well-being. They were kings, generals, and religious leaders, all combined.

After they died, pharaohs were thought to enter an eternal after-life, so their tombs were built to last. Many objects were buried with the pharaoh for use in the next world.

The pharaohs built other monuments to glorify their power and success. Let's learn more about these **structures** and the pharaohs who ordered their creation.

This map shows some of the sites of great monuments built during Egypt's three periods of stability under the pharaohs.





As soon as Khufu became pharaoh, he began construction on the Great Pyramid. Details of its creation still remain a mystery.

2. Pharaoh Khufu: The Pyramid Builder

The pharaoh Khufu (KOO-foo) ruled from about 2551 to 2528 B.C.E., during the Old Kingdom period. Today, he is best known as the architect of a famous pyramid.

Not much is known about Khufu. Some stories describe him as a cruel, harsh ruler. Others say that he was powerful but kind.

Historians do know that Khufu helped establish the pharaoh as a central **authority**. For example, he maintained strict control over Egypt's food supply. He oversaw the harvest and the storage of extra grain. He also controlled a large network of government officials who enforced his laws. Khufu emphasized his supreme power by declaring himself a god.

Khufu and other Old Kingdom pharaohs had magnificent pyramids built as tombs for themselves and their families. Khufu was responsible for the building of the Great Pyramid at Giza, one of the wonders of the ancient world.

The Great Pyramid sat at the center of a huge complex of temples, statues, monuments, and smaller tombs. It was made of more than 2 million stone blocks, perfectly fitted together. Inside, tunnels led to several burial chambers. The king's chamber had six roofs to hold up the weight of the stone layers above it.

Building the Great Pyramid was an amazing feat. No one knows exactly how the Egyptians constructed it, but it took about 20 years to complete. Khufu had strict control of the project, organizing and feeding thousands of workers. The finished pyramid was a stunning monument to Egyptian engineering.

This three-inch-high ivory statue of Khufu was discovered during the excavation of a temple in 1903. It is displayed in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.



3. Pharaoh Senusret I: Patron of the Arts

The pharaoh Senusret I (SEHN-oos-ret) ruled from about 1971 to 1926 B.C.E., during the Middle Kingdom. He was a strong leader who ruled a stable, unified Egypt. Art, literature, and architecture flourished during his **reign**.

The arts thrived under Senusret's rule. The pharaoh controlled mines filled with gold, copper, and gems such as purple amethyst. Artisans fashioned these materials into beautiful, highly detailed pieces of jewelry, such as bracelets and necklaces decorated with stones like turquoise.

Some of the greatest works in Egyptian literature were written during Senusret's reign. "The Story of Sinuhe" tells of a young official named Sinuhe who overhears a **plot** to kill the pharaoh. Fearing for his own life, Sinuhe flees Egypt. He thrives in his new land, but grows very homesick. When a new pharaoh calls him home, Sinuhe returns joyfully to Egypt.

Senusret's greatest accomplishments were in religious architecture. He had many temples, shrines, and religious monuments constructed and improved.

Perhaps Senusret's finest architectural achievement was the White Chapel. (A chapel is a small temple.) It was made of alabaster, a hard white stone. Some historians think that the chapel was originally covered in a thin layer of gold.

Beautiful artwork decorated the chapel's pillars. Carved scenes showed the pharaoh with various gods. Birds, animals, and Egyptian symbols were depicted.

Senusret wanted his memory to live on through his monuments, but few of his buildings survived the passage of time. A later pharaoh took the White Chapel apart and used the pieces in a monument of his own. Archaeologists later discovered the pieces and reconstructed the White Chapel.

Senusret helped build the Karnak Temple, whose pillars still stand and show beautifully carved hieroglyphs. The statues seen here are guarding the ancient artifacts within. Pharaohs from all three kingdoms contributed to this temple's construction.



4. Pharaoh Hatshepsut: Promoter of Egyptian Trade

During the New Kingdom, the pharaoh **Hatshepsut** (haht-SHEP-soot) ruled Egypt from about 1473 to 1458 B.C.E. Hatshepsut was one of Egypt's first female pharaohs. Under her rule, Egyptian art and architecture flourished. Hatshepsut was also known for encouraging trade.

One of her greatest accomplishments was her rise to power since few women had ever become Egyptian pharaohs. Initially, she shared power with her male relatives. However, she soon achieved sole leadership.

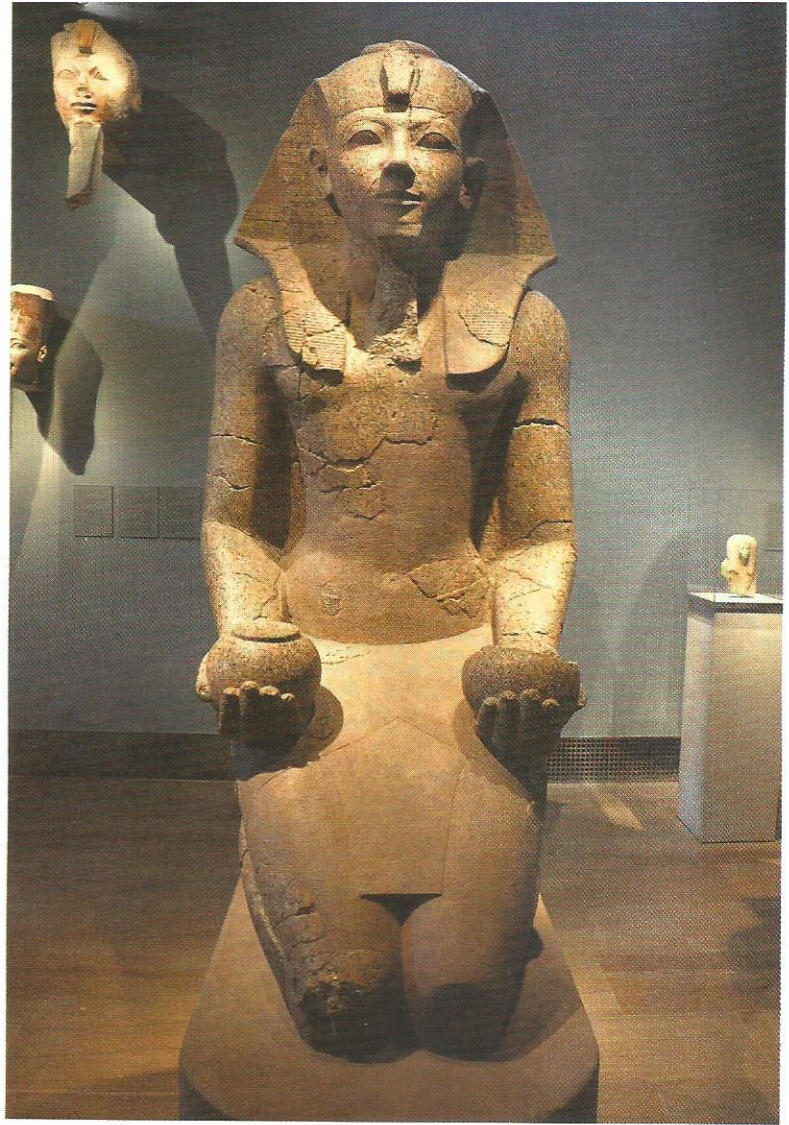
Hatshepsut strengthened her position in several ways. She filled her government with loyal advisers. She demanded the same respect shown to male rulers. She sometimes dressed in men's clothing, even putting on the fake beard male

pharaohs wore. Artists were often instructed to portray her as a man. She also spread stories that her father was a god.

As pharaoh, Hatshepsut promoted trade with other countries. Her biggest trade expedition was to the African kingdom of Punt, at the southern end of the Red Sea. Over 200 men in five ships brought gifts and traded goods to Punt.

Hatshepsut left behind a stunning monument to her reign—a great temple at Dayr al-Bahri (deer ahl-BAH-ray). The main part of the temple was built into a cliff above the Nile River. At the entrance were two tall, thin monuments called *obelisks*. The entrance was also graced by 200 sphinx statues. The sphinx is a mythical creature with the body of a lion and the head of a man.

Scenes from Hatshepsut's reign decorated the temple walls. Detailed carvings portrayed the great voyage to Punt, and illustrated the valuable items the pharaoh's traders had brought back to Egypt.



Hatshepsut actively encouraged trade. During her reign, trade helped spread Egyptian influence along the Nile and in nearby Middle Eastern lands, like western Asia.

Hatshepsut one of the first female pharaohs of ancient Egypt

This painting displays Ramses II in battle. He was a brilliant military leader who became a captain in his father's army at the age of ten.



Ramses II an ancient Egyptian pharaoh, known as “Ramses the Great”; skilled as a military leader; and responsible for building many monuments, including the temple at Abu Simbel

treaty a written agreement by which two or more states agree to peaceful relations

5. Ramses II: Military Leader and Master Builder

The pharaoh **Ramses II** (RAM-seez) ruled from about 1290 to 1224 B.C.E., during the New Kingdom. Called Ramses the Great, he is one of the most famous pharaohs. He reigned for more than 60 years, longer than almost any other pharaoh. He is best known for his military leadership and for building numerous monuments.

Ramses used his power to excess. He had over 100 wives and more than 100 children. Never shy about his importance, he had hundreds of statues of himself erected throughout Egypt, some of which stood over 60 feet high.

From a young age, Ramses was a fearless soldier, fighting alongside his father in various battles. At the age of ten, Ramses became a captain in the Egyptian army.

Ramses tried to defend an Egyptian empire that extended north into Canaan. His most famous military campaigns were against the Hittite Empire in Anatolia (present-day Turkey). The Hittites constantly threatened Egypt's northern borders. In his best known battle, Ramses reached a standoff with the Hittites, even though he was greatly outnumbered.

Ramses was also a peacemaker. He and the Hittites signed the world's first peace **treaty**, which lasted until the Hittite Empire collapsed around 1190 B.C.E.

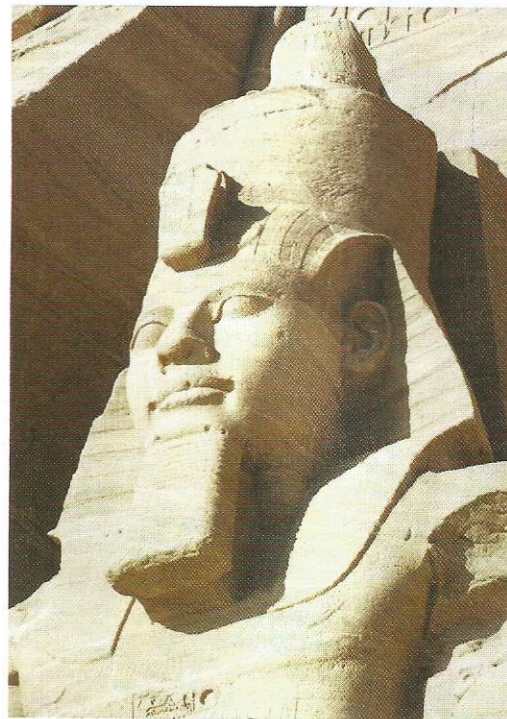
One of Ramses's greatest projects was the temple complex at Abu Simbel. The main temple was carved into the side of a cliff that was on a bank of the Nile River. A smaller temple honored his favorite wife, Nefertari.

Four giant statues of a seated Ramses framed the entrance to the main temple. The figures were carved right out of the rock face of the cliff and are among the finest examples of the artistic skill of Egyptian sculptors.

The inside of the temple was also remarkable. Visitors passed through three large rooms, called halls, to reach the temple's main room. This room's altar contained statues of Ramses and three Egyptian gods. The temple was assembled so that, twice a year, the sun aligned with the entrance, allowing beams of sunlight to shine down the halls and illuminate the statues.

Ramses demanded more temples and monuments built than any other pharaoh in history. When he died, he was buried in the tomb that he had ordered workers to construct solely for him. His mummy is one of the best-preserved bodies ever found.

This is the view, from below, of one of the four 66-foot statues of Ramses II, seated at the entrance to the main temple at Abu Simbel.



Lesson Summary

In this lesson, you learned about the accomplishments of four of the pharaohs of ancient Egypt who ruled during three long periods of stability.

Ancient Egypt and Its Rulers Ancient Egypt enjoyed three periods of stability and unity under the rule of pharaohs. These periods were the Old Kingdom (Age of the Pyramids) from about 2700 to 2200 B.C.E.; the Middle Kingdom, (Period of Reunification) from about 2000 to 1800 B.C.E.; and the New Kingdom, (Golden Age) from about 1600 to 1100 B.C.E.

Pharaoh Khufu During the Old Kingdom, Khufu set up a strong central government. He also had the Great Pyramid built at Giza, which was an amazing construction feat and one of the wonders of the ancient world.

Pharaoh Senusret During the Middle Kingdom, Senusret encouraged Egyptian art and literature. Artisans and architects created fine works, including the White Chapel.

Pharaoh Hatshepsut Hatshepsut, Egypt's first female pharaoh, promoted Egyptian trade during the New Kingdom. She had a great temple built at Dayr al-Bahri.

Pharaoh Ramses II Ramses the Great was a superior military leader and builder of monuments during the New Kingdom. He signed the world's first peace treaty with the Hittites. He had the temple complex at Abu Simbel built.