

# Egypt under the Pharoahs



Nearly 2,500 years ago, the Greek historian Herodotus wrote, "Concerning Egypt itself I shall extend my remarks to a great length, because there is no country that possesses so many wonders, nor any that has such a number of works that defy description."<sup>1</sup> Even today, many would agree with this assessment. The ancient Egyptians left to the world a profusion of spectacular monuments dating across three millennia. From the cliffs of the Libyan and Arabian deserts they cut giant blocks of stone and erected grand temples to their immortal gods (see "The Gods and Goddesses of Egypt," page 54). From the same imperishable material that symbolized the timelessness of their world, the Egyptians set up countless statues of their equally immortal god-kings and built thousands of tombs to serve as eternal houses of the dead. The solemn and ageless art of the Egyptians expresses the unchanging order that, for them, was divinely established.

The backbone of Egypt was, and still is, the Nile River, whose annual floods supported all life in that ancient land (MAP 3-1). Even more than the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers of Mesopotamia, the Nile defined the cultures that developed along its banks. Originating deep in Africa, the world's longest river flows through regions that may not receive a single drop of rainfall in a decade. Yet crops thrive from the rich soil that the Nile brings thousands of miles from the African hills. In the time of the *pharaohs*, the ancient Egyptian kings, the land bordering the Nile consisted of marshes dotted with island ridges. The Egyptians hunted the amphibious animals that swarmed through the tall forests of *papyrus* and rushes in the marshes. Egypt's fertility was famous. When Egypt became a province of the Roman Empire after Queen Cleopatra's death (r. 51–30 BCE), it served as the granary of the Mediterranean world.



- Ancient Egypt was a super power
- Fertile and wealthy
- Powerful military
- Architectural feats
- Engineering marvels
- Most advanced learning center
- Distinguished and organized government
- Vast library

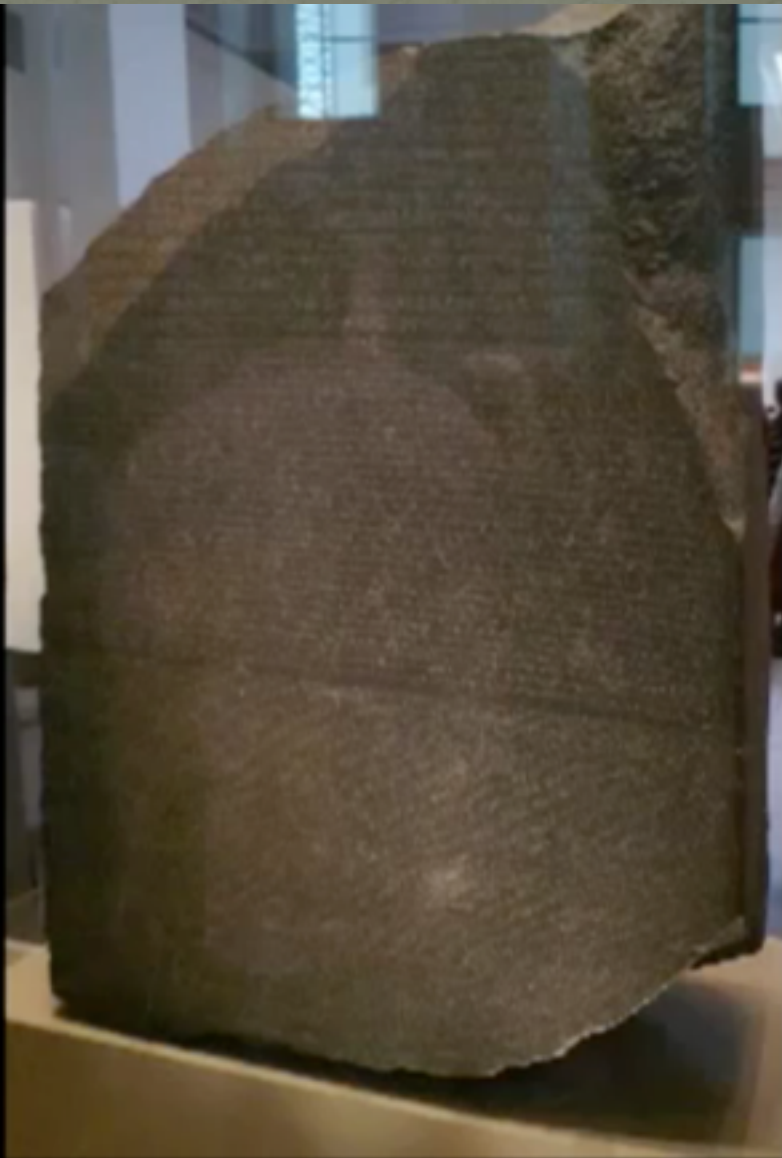
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- Manetho, an Egyptian High priest, described a succession of pharaohs, dividing them into *dynasties*
  - Scientific history or archaeology began proper in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century
  - Modern Europe re discovered Egypt
  - 1799, Napoleon Bonaparte, on a military expedition, took linguists, scholars, artists etc to investigate
  - Found the Rosetta Stone





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- Able to now read hieroglyphics, Egyptian Writing
  - The images are not pictographs, they signify sounds
  - Able to discover this because the same line is written in 3 languages.





Rosetta Stone,  
granite, 114.4 cm x  
72.3 x 27.9 cm or 45 x  
28.5 x 11 in. (British  
Museum)

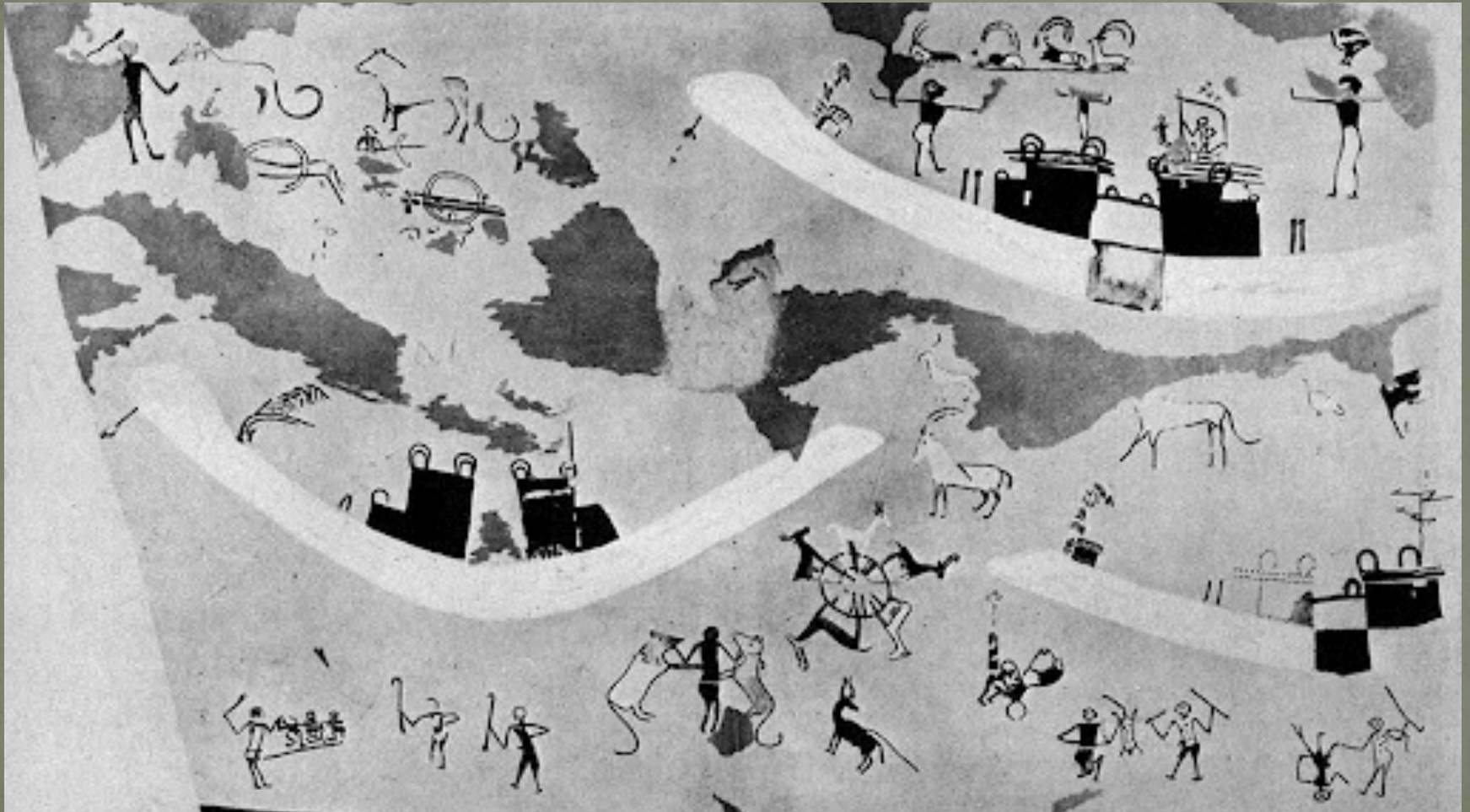


- Ancient Greek (language of government), Demotic( the language of the people), then hieroglyphics (sacred writing)
- Names of rulers, Tolemy the 5<sup>th</sup>.
- 3 different languages, helped us to unlock the language
- British defeated Napoleon and thus it is still with Britain
- Originally in a temple, this is the bottom section of a larger structure

- • Civilization in Egypt organized earlier, but first dynasties 3000 BCE-the start of the old kingdom
  - Pharaoh was supreme ruler and a god- basis of all civilization and of artwork
  - Knowledge of civilization rest solely in tombs
- • Preoccupation with the cult of the dead (like Neolithic) but no fear of the spirits of the dead
  - Elaborate funerary practices led to the erection of mastabas, pyramids, and rock-cut tombs in sacred imperial precincts throughout Egypt
- • Each person must provide for the happiness of his afterlife- would reproduce daily life in tombs for their Ka (spirit) to enjoy- blurring of line between life and death
  - Tomb was like afterlife insurance



People, boats and animals, detail of a watercolour copy of a wall painting from a Predynastic tomb at Hierakonpolis, 3500 BC



- Found in the tomb
- Funerary scene
- Boat symbolic of the journey down the river of life and death
- Boats painted white and carry tombs
- Mourning women
- Stick figures, random composition



# Palette of King Narmer ca. 3000–2920 BC

## The unification of Egypt





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- Platform to do cosmetics
  - Making eye make up to protect eyes from the sun
  - Utilitarian object
  - Official carries his sandals and jar for cleansing after kill
  - Human armed falcon, symbol of sky god, Horus
  - Protector of the king
  - Falcon has hook, enbalming hook to remove brains
  - Takes captive a man-headed hieroglyph for land, from which papyrus grows
  - Symbol for lower Egypt





- 2 enemies below
- 2 heads of Hathor, a goddess in favour of Narmer.
- Cow with a woman's face
- Between heads is Narmer's name with frame representing the palace



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- Front shows Narmer wearing the cobra crown of lower Egypt
  - Reviewing beheaded bodies
  - Severed head between legs
  - Great bull knocking down a rebellious city
  - Winding necks are a symbol for unification



**T**he Egyptians did not make the sharp distinction between body and soul that is basic to many religions. Rather, they believed that from birth a person was accompanied by a kind of other self, the *ka* (life force), which, on the death of the body, could inhabit the corpse and live on. For the *ka* to live securely, however, the body had to remain as nearly intact as possible. To ensure that it did, the Egyptians developed the technique of embalming (*mummification*) to a high art. Although the Egyptians believed that the god Anubis invented embalming to preserve the body of the murdered Osiris (see “The Gods and Goddesses of Egypt,” page 54), they did not practice mummification systematically until the Fourth Dynasty.

The first step in the 70-day process was the surgical removal of the lungs, liver, stomach, and intestines through an incision in the left flank. The Egyptians thought these organs were most subject to decay. The organs were individually wrapped and placed in four containers known as *canopic jars* for eventual deposit in the burial chamber with the corpse. (The jars take their name from the Egyptian port of Canopus, where human-headed jars were worshiped as personifications of Osiris. These jars were not, however, used in embalming.) The brain not attach any special significance to the brain. But they left in place the heart, necessary for life and regarded as the seat of intelligence.

Next, the body was treated for 40 days with natron, a naturally occurring salt compound that dehydrated the body. Then the corpse was filled with resin-soaked linens, and the embalming incision was closed and covered with a representation of the *wedjat* eye of Horus, a powerful *amulet* (a device to ward off evil and promote rebirth). Finally, the body was treated with lotions and resins and then wrapped tightly with hundreds of yards of linen bandages to maintain its shape. The Egyptians often placed other amulets within the bandages or on the corpse. The most important were heart *scarabs* (gems in the shape of beetles). Spells written on them ensured that the heart would be returned to its owner if it were ever lost. A scroll copy of the *Book of the Dead* (FIG. 3-36) frequently was placed between the legs of the deceased. It contained some 200 spells intended to protect the mummy and the *ka* in the afterlife. The mummies of the wealthy had their faces covered with funerary masks (FIG. 3-1).



## Kings of the Dead

- Ancient Egyptians believed that when the pharaoh died, he became Osiris, king of the dead. The new pharaoh became Horus, god of the heavens and protector of the sun god. This cycle was symbolized by the rising and setting of the sun.
- Some part of a dead pharaoh's spirit, called his *ka*, was believed to remain with his body. And it was thought that if the corpse did not have proper care, the former pharaoh would not be able to carry out his new duties as king of the dead. If this happened, the cycle would be broken and disaster would befall Egypt.
- To prevent such a catastrophe, each dead pharaoh was mummified, which preserved his body. Everything the king would need in his afterlife was provided in his grave—vessels made of clay, stone, and gold, furniture, food, even doll-like representations of servants, known as *ushabti*. His body would continue to receive food offerings long after his death.



Imhotep Stepped Pyramid  
and mortuary precinct of  
King Djoser, Saqqara,  
Dynasty III

2625 BC

- Builder of King Djoser
- High priest o Sun God
- Worshipped after his death
- About 200 ft high



- Intended to hold his mummified body, Pharaoh Djoser's Step Pyramid at Saqqara began as a traditional, flat-roofed mastaba. But by the end of his 19-year reign, in 2611 B.C., it had risen to six stepped layers and stood 204 feet (62 meters) high. **It was the largest building of its time.**
- Extensive use of stone—here and there carved to resemble wood, reeds, or other softer materials—made the tomb more durable than its mud-brick forebears. Such pioneering techniques led many ancient historians to credit the chief architect, Imhotep, with inventing stone architecture.
- The Step Pyramid complex was enclosed by a 30-foot (10-meter) wall and included courtyards, temples, and chapels covering nearly 40 acres (16 hectares)—the size of a large town in the third millennium B.C.
- As in earlier mastaba tombs, the Step Pyramid's **burial chambers are underground**, hidden in a maze of tunnels, probably to discourage grave robbers. The tomb was nevertheless plundered, and all that remains of Djoser, the third king of Egypt's 3rd dynasty, is his mummified left foot.
- ***CLASSIC FACT:** Imhotep—architect of the Step Pyramid, physician, priest, and founder of a cult of healing—was deified 1,400 years after his lifetime.*

# Great Pyramids, Gizeh, Egypt, Fourth Dynasty, Menkaure, Khafre, Khufu





## Tombs Fit for Kings

- To shelter and safeguard the part of a pharaoh's soul that remained with his corpse, Egyptians built massive tombs—but not always pyramids.
- Before the pyramids, tombs were carved into bedrock and topped by flat-roofed structures called mastabas. Mounds of dirt, in turn, sometimes topped the structures.
- The pyramid shape of later tombs could have come from these mounds. More likely, Egyptian pyramids were modeled on a sacred, pointed stone called the *benben*. The benben symbolized the rays of the sun; ancient texts claimed that pharaohs reached the heavens via sunbeams.



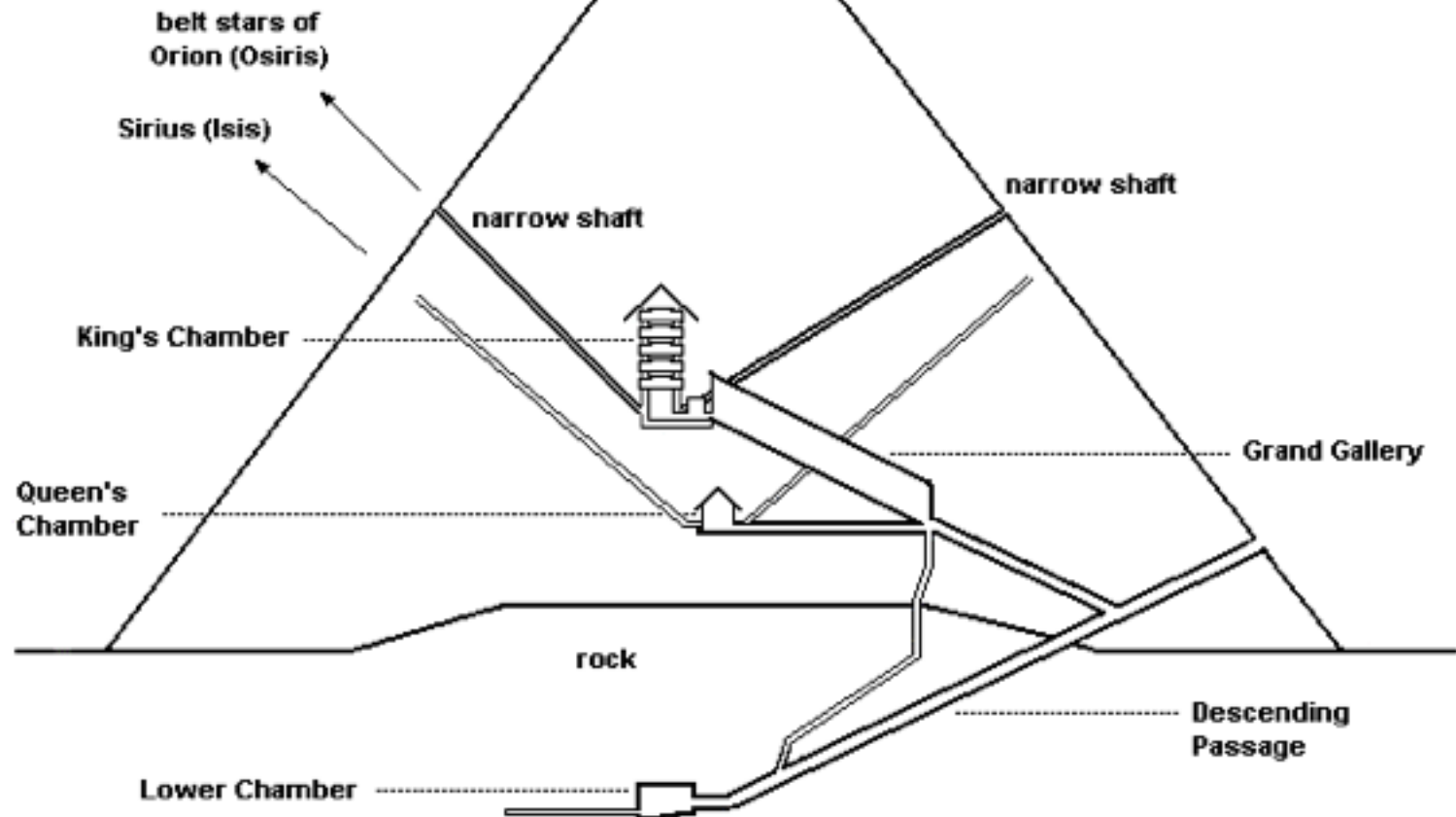
The Great Pyramid  
of Giza is the oldest  
and largest of the  
three pyramids in  
the Giza Necropolis  
bordering what is  
now El Giza, Egypt.  
2548 BC  
construction began  
139 m



## Who Built the Pyramids?

- Contrary to some popular depictions, the pyramid builders were not slaves or foreigners. Excavated skeletons show that they were Egyptians who lived in villages developed and overseen by the pharaoh's supervisors.
- The builders' villages boasted bakers, butchers, brewers, granaries, houses, cemeteries, and probably even some sorts of health-care facilities—there is evidence of laborers surviving crushed or amputated limbs. Bakeries excavated near the Great Pyramids could have produced thousands of loaves of bread every week.
- Some of the builders were permanent employees of the pharaoh. Others were conscripted for a limited time from local villages. Some may have been women: Although no depictions of women builders have been found, some female skeletons show wear that suggests they labored with heavy stone for long periods of time.
- Graffiti indicates that at least some of these workers took pride in their work, calling their teams "Friends of Khufu," "Drunkards of Menkaure," and so on—names indicating allegiances to pharaohs.
- An estimated 20,000 to 30,000 workers built the Pyramids at Giza over 80 years. Much of the work probably happened while the River Nile was flooded.
- Huge limestone blocks could be floated from quarries right to the base of the Pyramids. The stones would likely then be polished by hand and pushed up ramps to their intended positions.
- It took more than manual labor, though. Architects achieved an accurate pyramid shape by running ropes from the outer corners up to the planned summit, to make sure the stones were positioned correctly. And priests-astronomers helped choose the pyramids' sites and orientations, so that they would be on the appropriate axis in relation to sacred constellations.
- From stone pusher to priest, every worker would likely have recognized his or her role in continuing the life-and-death cycle of the pharaohs, and thereby in perpetuating the glory of Egypt.

## Section of the Great Pyramid of Cheops at Giza





## WONDER OF THE WORLD

- Khufu, son of Snefru and second ruler of the 4th dynasty moved the royal necropolis to Giza, north of modern-day Cairo. According to ancient Greek historian Herodotus, Khufu (aka Cheops) enslaved his people to build his pyramid. But archaeologists have since disproved his account
- On the Giza Plateau, Khufu's builders oriented his pyramid almost perfectly north. The **largest pyramid ever built**, it incorporates about 2.3 million stone blocks, weighing an average of 2.5 to 15 tons each. It is estimated that the workers would have had to set a block every two and a half minutes.
- The pyramid has **three burial chambers**. The first is underground, carved into bedrock. The second, aboveground chamber was called the queen's chamber by early explorers. We now know it was never intended to house one of Khufu's wives but perhaps a sacred statue of the king himself. The third is the king's chamber, which held a red granite sarcophagus placed almost exactly at the center of the pyramid.
- The king's chamber is accessed via the 26-foot-high (8-meter-high) Grand Gallery, which was sealed off from thieves by sliding granite blocking systems.
- The Great Pyramid was the centerpiece of an elaborate complex, which included several small pyramids, five boat pits, a mortuary temple, a causeway, a valley temple, and many flat-roofed tombs for officials and some members of the royal family.









- Carved out of limestone, the Sphinx has the facial features of a man and the body of a recumbent lion; it is approximately 240 feet (73 m) long and 66 feet (20 m) high.
- The Sphinx was built in about 2530 BC by the pharaoh **Khafre** (4th king of Fourth dynasty, c. 2575–c. 2465 BC), the builder and occupant of the second Giza pyramid. The sphinx's face is a **portrait** of the king and the sphinx continued to be a royal portrait type through most of Egyptian history.
- The Sphinx is thought to be primarily a **guardian figure**, protecting the tomb of the Khafre by warding off evil spirits. Arabs know the Sphinx of Giza by the name of Abu al-Hawl, or "Father of Terror."
- The Sphinx's face was mainly **damaged** during French occupation around 1800, when Mameluke troops used it for target practice for their field cannons, but its body has been weathered by the elements for thousands of years

- Though Khafre's pyramid is shorter than his father Khufu's nearby Great Pyramid, Khafre made up for it by building at a higher elevation and surrounding his pyramid with a **more elaborate complex**.
- Within the burial chamber, explorers discovered a small pit cut in the floor—perhaps designed to hold the first canopic chest in a pyramid. Canopic chests held jars carved in the shapes of protective spirits. These jars, in turn, held the preserved liver, lungs, stomach, and intestines of the deceased. The brain would have been discarded, and the heart left in the body.
- Outside the pyramid all the **typical elements of a pharaonic mortuary temple** are seen in one place for the first time: entrance hall, colonnaded courtyard, niches for royal statuary, storage chambers, and interior sanctuary. Later pyramids would be significantly smaller, with greater emphasis on these mortuary temples.
- Khafre's necropolis also boasted an unprecedented profusion of statues, among them **the Sphinx**. Carved from bedrock in front of Khafre's pyramid, the Sphinx depicts the pharaoh as a human-headed lion, wearing the headdress of the pharaohs. The great statue is the embodiment of Khafre, the third ruler of the 4th dynasty, as the god Horus.





Ramesses II: Ramesses II, Herakleopolis (Temple of Harsaphes), New Kingdom, Egypt, c. 1250 B.C.E.



- Ramses II
- Placed in temple, common people not allowed in innermost areas of temple
- Seen by priests, they bring offerings and place them at his feet
- Idealized body









- In 1257 BCE, Pharaoh Ramses II (1279-13 BCE) had two temples carved out of solid rock at a site on the west bank of the Nile south of Aswan in the land of Nubia and known today as Abu Simbel. Long before Ramses II, the site had been sacred to Hathor of Absek.
- The temple built by Ramses, however, was dedicated to the sun gods Amon-Re and Re-Horakhte. Because of their remote location near the Sudanese border in southern Egypt, the temples were unknown until their rediscovery in 1813. They were first explored in 1817 by the Egyptologist Giovanni Battista Belzoni.
- The sacred area, marked out as a forecourt and bounded on the north and south sides by brick walls, occupied a place between the sandstone cliffs and the river. Ramses' temple was cut into the face of the cliff, before which is a rock-cut terrace. The temple is approached across this terrace up a flight of steps with an inclined plane in the middle, and enclosed on either side by a balustrade behind which stood a row of hawks and statues of Ramses in various forms.
- The rock-cut façade of Ramses' temple represents the front of a pylon in front of which are four colossal seated figures of Ramses. This facade is one 119 feet wide, and 100 feet high, while the colossal statues are 67 feet in height. At the top of the pylon, above the cornice, is a row of baboons, who, as Watchers of the Dawn, are shown with their hands raised in adoration of the (rising) sun.
- The Egyptians believed baboons played a role in helping the sun god Ra defeat the darkness of night and so were believed sacred to the worship of the rising sun.





## Seated Scribe, from mastaba tomb at Saqqara, Dynasty V 2500 BC Painted Limestone, approx, 21" high

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- 4600 years old
- Holding papyrus of scroll
- Would have been holding writing instrument
- Can write, key skill, high class but not divine
- Represented in a naturalistic fashion
- Fat around middle, signifier for wealth
- Older, sense of wisdom
- Inset eyes, rock crystal surrounded by copper
- Character, informal pose
- Funerary sculpture
- Transcendant
- Meant for after life, meant for interior of a tomb, for eternal existence



Thutmose, Queen Nefertiti, from Tell el-Amarna, dynasty XVIII 1335BC  
Painted Limestone, Approx, 20" high

Pharaoh Akhenaten's Wife





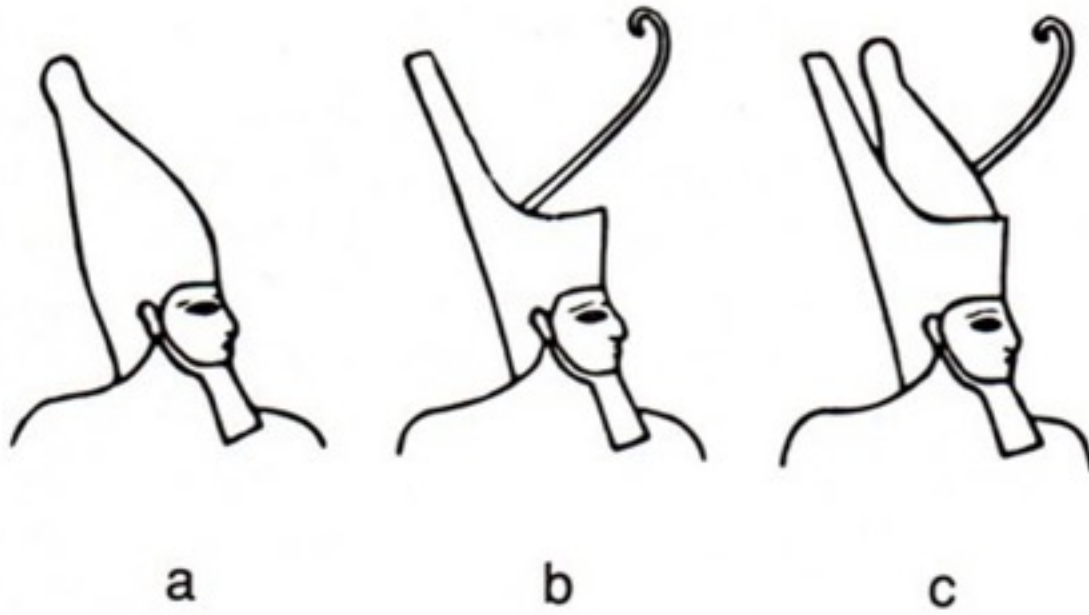
- Was not intended for a tomb
- Made by artist
- Model he made to work as a prototype, found in his studio
- Incomplete, one eye not finished, no stones
- Painted limestone and covered with a thin layer of plaster, allowed subtle effects, fine details
- Elegant, sensitively carved
- Face and chin form triangle
- Continues to neck as well
- Wife of pharaoh, new idea of beauty
- She may have actually shared power, depicted with elements of power in other works





Queen Tiye, from  
Gurob dynasty  
XVIII, 1335 BC

Ebony, approx 4"  
high



Upper Egypt

Lower Egypt

All of Egypt





- The Ancient Egyptians believed that as long as a pharaoh's name was remembered he would live for all eternity. Tutankhamun also known as King Tut was a minor King. He died when he was only nineteen years old, but the discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun and its fabulous wealth has made King Tut one of the most famous Pharaohs of Ancient Egypt. This short King Tut Biography provides interesting information about this famous Pharaoh.
- King Tut belonged to the Eighteenth dynasty of Egyptian Kings during the period of the New Kingdom. His family members included the following:
  - The Father of Tutankhamun was Akhenaten, first known as Amenhotep
  - The Mother of Tutankhamun was believed to be a noblewoman called Kiya
  - His Stepmother was Nefertiti, the chief wife of Akhanaten
  - The wife and consort of King Tut was Ankhesenpaaten (aka Ankhesanamum), who was also his half sister
  - Children: None survived. His two daughters were still born and were buried with Tutankhamun
- King Tut died unexpectedly in the year of 1325 at the age of 18/19. He reigned for just 9 years and the cause of his death still remains a mystery. He was buried in his hastily prepared tomb in the Valley of the Kings 70 days after his death, according to the death rituals of the Ancient Egyptians.





- Tutankhamen is probably the best-known of the pharaohs, owing to the fortunate discovery of his treasure-filled tomb virtually intact. His burial place in the Valley of the Kings had escaped the fate of the tombs of other ancient Egyptian kings.
- Fortunately, the entrance was hidden from tomb raiders by debris heaped over it during the cutting of the later tomb of the twelfth century B.C.E. King Ramses VI. In 1922 Howard Carter (1873–1939) discovered Tutankhamen's tomb after searching for nearly ten years.
- Tutankhamen's tomb remains as one of the greatest and most important discoveries in archeology (the study of ancient forms of life). From Carter's discovery, historians were able to piece together the life of King Tutankhamen.
- The tomb room contained more than five thousand objects, many of which were covered with gold and beautifully carved.
- The most famous of these objects is probably the lifelike gold mask that covered the face of Tutankhamen's mummy.
- Carter also uncovered military items, clothing, jewelry, and many statues of Tutankhamen and Egyptian gods.
- In fact, there were so many items in the tomb that many are still being examined today and have yet to be displayed in museums—nearly eighty years after their discovery.



