



# Ancient Egypt

# The Old, Middle, & New Kingdoms

Historians have divided ancient Egypt's history into three main parts: the Old Kingdom, the Middle Kingdom, and the New Kingdom. Only one ruler ruled at a time during each of these three kingdoms. The periods of time in between these kingdoms are known as the intermediate periods. During these times, competing dynasties ruled different parts of Egypt and often went to war with each other.

## The Old Kingdom

The Old Kingdom began around 2625 B.C. and lasted for about 500 years. During this time, Egypt had a strong government and flourishing economy. Egypt was divided into separate regions called *nômes*, and each nome was ruled by a governor who reported to the pharaoh.

The Old Kingdom is well known for its achievements in building pyramids during this time. This period is often referred to as the Age of Pyramids. The pyramids were built as burial places for the bodies of Egyptian rulers and other important people. The bodies were preserved through a process of mummification and then placed into the pyramid along with the dead person's belongings and treasures. It was believed their bodies and belongings would be needed in the afterlife.

The Old Kingdom ended when government officials stopped obeying the pharaohs. Egypt was also dealing with famine and drought during this time. Egypt ended up breaking up into smaller states, and the intermediate period that followed lasted for about 150 years. During this time, rival kings fought each other in numerous civil wars.

## • The Middle Kingdom

The Middle Kingdom started around 1980 B.C. when a mighty leader named Mentuhotep II reunited Egypt under one rule. He is considered the first pharaoh of the Middle Kingdom.

Egypt saw many changes during the Middle Kingdom. Trade expanded during this time. Egypt imported items such as gold, copper, ebony, ivory, and incense from far off places. Egypt also grew in size as Egyptian armies conquered parts of Nubia, a land south of Egypt.

A pharaoh, named Sesostris III, reorganized Egypt's system of government so that all the governors were controlled by the Pharaoh's vizier, the pharaoh's highest official. This gave the pharaoh more power over his kingdom.

The Middle Kingdom started to fall into disarray as it lost its prosperity and northern Egypt split from southern Egypt. The intermediate period that followed is best known for when the Hyksos, a group of people from western Asia, ruled over much of Egypt.

## The New Kingdom

The New Kingdom started around 1520 B.C. when Pharaoh Ahmose conquered the Hyksos and reunited Egypt under one rule once again. A full-time army was employed for the first time ever in Egypt during the New Kingdom. The troops protected Egypt from invaders and expanded Egypt's territory by conquering more lands.

During this time, Queen Hatshepsut, the first female pharaoh, expanded trade with distant lands. Her stepson, Thutmose III, conquered so many new lands that the empire reached its largest size under his rule.

The New Kingdom was a time of prosperity, and Egyptians showed their wealth by building huge temples for their gods. They stopped building pyramids and placed the mummies of their pharaohs in hidden tombs in the Valley of the Kings. This kept the mummies and their riches safe from tomb robbers.

Around 1353 B.C. Pharaoh Akhenaton ordered that the names of all Egyptian gods be removed from temples and tombs. He wanted Egypt to only worship one god named Aton. This did not go over well with the Egyptian people. Many continued to worship the old gods in secret. When Pharaoh Tutankhamen came into power after Akhenaton's death, he restored worship of the old Egyptian gods. Pharaoh Tutankhamen, also known as King Tut, reigned for a short period of time. He was only 9 when he came into power and died at the young age of 18.

Around 1215 B.C. Egypt began to lose power and parts of the empire once again. Outsiders invaded and civil wars within the empire erupted. These events mark the end of the New Kingdom.