

EGYPT - OLD KINGDOM Final Script

INTRODUCTION

Few monuments of past civilisations have evoked as much mystery and fascination as the pyramids of Egypt's Old Kingdom.

EGYPT - OLD KINGDOM Main Title

Old Kingdom Egypt comprises four major dynasties from the Third Dynasty to the Sixth Dynasty, around 2686 – 2131 BC. This was first great period of the pharaonic era. Much of what is known about society at this time has been revealed by archaeological evidence from their ancient cemeteries.

Each summer, when the Nile overflowed its banks and replenished the parched earth, the cycle of life began again. As the Nile receded and the growing season started, the people of ancient Egypt reflected on the power of the Sun God, Re, and his earthly counterpart, the Pharaoh.

GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING Chapter Heading

Egypt is a desert country in northeastern Africa. The Libyan, Nubian and Eastern Deserts form a natural barrier from enemies. The mountains between the Nile and the Red Sea also gave protection from eastern invasion.

The Nile River, with its annual flooding and inundation, is the vital lifeline of Egypt. Beginning at Lake Victoria, tributaries join the White Nile as it flows north to Khartoum. The Blue Nile begins in the mountain ranges of Ethiopia, and carries silt, the rich black mud of the Nile. The river continues on through Egypt, flowing into the Delta and finally emptying into the Mediterranean. The Ancient Egyptians compared the Nile to a lotus flower, with the stalk of Upper Egypt sustaining the flowering blossom of the Delta.

South of the rich Delta region, Menes, king of the First Dynasty, founded Egypt's original capital at MEMPHIS. Memphis became the political, administrative and religious centre of the Old Kingdom. To the north and south of Memphis are found the Memphite necropolises, burial sites for the ancient pharaohs, nobles and officials of Egypt.

GIZA, famous for the pyramids of Khufu, Khafre and Menkara built during the Fourth Dynasty, is arguably the most recognisable archaeological site in the world. The great sphinx is located here, as are the smaller pyramids for royal wives.

The sun temple of Userkaf is located at ABU SIR, together with pyramids and tombs dating from the Fifth Dynasty. SAQQARA is named after SOKKAR the god of the dead, and contains Djoser's step pyramid.

Located directly south of Saqqara is DASHUR. It is the site of Sneferu's "bent" pyramid (sometimes called the Southern Pyramid of Sneferu) and, also, the Northern Pyramid.

POLITICAL ORGANISATION Chapter Heading

The pharaoh was all-powerful, with supreme control over Egypt's political structure, religion and military. The word pharaoh comes from the Egyptian term PER OA, which means great house, and referred to the royal palace. The pharaoh was the Son of Re, the sun god, and was deemed to be a god on earth. His main role was the upholding of MA'AT – truth, harmony, righteousness and unity. When Ma'at was upheld, this meant that good conquered evil, and the gods were pleased with the pharaoh. As symbolic protection, the pharaoh wore a skirt with a distinctive panel made of either bull or lion's tail. He carried an amulet, the ANKH, representing life. A false beard of goat's hair was favoured, and his head was adorned with a crown of varying colours, red for lower Egypt and white for upper. Universally, the pharaoh held a crook and a flail.

The Bureaucracy of Old Kingdom was divided three ways: political, religious and military.

POLITICALLY, the VIZIER was the most powerful official in the land, with authority second only to the pharaoh. The vizier supervised the treasury and all royal possessions, acted as chief judge and overseer of royal documents. He administered public works, agriculture, and granaries, and controlled the affairs of the provincial governors, who were called NOMARCHS. Although nomarchs were directly responsible to the Vizier, due to their distance from the capital at Memphis, they often wielded great power within their region. Nomarchs presided over local courts, supervised their armies, conducted the annual census and collected taxes.

PRIESTS played an important role in shaping Egypt's religious and political history. The RE priesthood was the most influential during the Old Kingdom. Priests shaved their bodies and heads, and wore long pleated gowns with sleeves. They gave daily offerings, and organised dramas and festivals to the gods. Priesthood could be inherited within a family. Priests practiced medicine, studied the heavens and developed a great understanding of astronomy and measurement. They instructed students in reading, writing, sculpture, engineering and draughtsmanship, in schools connected to temples.

MILITARY forces were organised in three categories. First, there was a small permanent army, which also contained Nubian conscripts. Secondly, local leaders had command of an emergency militia. Finally, national conscripts manned the garrisons of frontier fortresses, with their primary role to provide labour for public works. Bows and arrows and daggers were the weapons of the Egyptian army.

SOCIAL STRUCTURE Chapter Heading

Egyptian society was hierarchical, structured downwards from the pharaoh; vizier; senior officials – political, religious and military; the pharaoh's sons and chief courtiers; minor officials, lesser courtiers and scribes; skilled craftsmen & artisans; tradesmen, merchants and soldiers; down to peasant farmers, herdsmen, field labourers and domestic servants.

The pharaoh had a principle wife, who was expected to produce an heir to the throne. He also had a harem, usually marrying his sisters. These marriages kept the royal bloodline pure, imitating the marital customs of deities such as Isis and Osiris, who were brother and sister. Marriages were also arranged with foreign princesses to establish peaceful relations with Egypt's neighbours.

A strong hierarchy determined the status and roles of WOMEN in Egyptian society. Marriage and divorce was a legal arrangement. A man was expected to provide a household and love and respect his wife. A woman was usually ranked by her husband's status, no matter what the social class. Social status could also be gained through the achievements of children. It was considered a great honour to be the mother of a high-ranking official. In the homes of upper class nobles, women probably had a free hand in running their households. They lived in luxury with many servants, fine clothes, jewellery and cosmetics. It was common for women to perform priestly duties and a few became high-ranking officials. Little, however, is known of the lives of royal women. This can be explained by the fact that scribes were all men, with little interest in the roles women played in Egyptian society.

Lower class women worked as servants, or were singers, dancers and musicians. Women were employed as mourners at funerals, a highly esteemed profession. The majority had menial daily chores: preparing food; weaving, spinning and washing; and winnowing wheat and barley at harvest time.

In the Old Kingdom, SCRIBES were vital to the prosperity of Egypt. Because of their ability to read, write and calculate numbers, they kept records on all

aspects of life, and formed a literary class. Scribes were employed in every government department, temple and estate.

ARTISANS formed a middle class between the nobility and officials, and the peasant classes. They were primarily employed to work in tombs and temples. They carved stone or wood, made pottery and worked precious metals, creating jewellery. Artisans could be richly rewarded, as their works conferred immortality on their subjects.

In the lowest class AGRICULTURAL WORKERS, were peasant farmers, working their fields to produce food crops. They grazed sheep, cows and goats on desert fringes and the fertile green land of the delta. The seasons and the annual flooding of the River Nile guided their lives.

THE ECONOMY Chapter Heading

The Egyptian economy was based on agriculture, and prosperity was measured by agricultural production. The Nile also provided water for irrigation and was the major trade route linking the nomes, or provinces of Egypt.

Men and women worked in the fields, with farming the largest Egyptian industry. There was only one harvest per year, with winter wheat, barley, broad beans and chickpeas farmed. Vegetables were grown in kitchen gardens. Cattle, goats, sheep, pigs, and geese were kept. Oxen were used for ploughing and donkeys carried heavy produce. Farmers used hoes, plow and sickles, made from wood and stone. Fish were caught using spears or nets, and were exchanged for other goods.

Travel overland through the desert was difficult and treacherous, so the Nile became the highway of Egypt. Small, papyrus fishing boats shared the river with huge barges used to transport stone from quarries. Vessels travelling northward would be carried along with the current, while those travelling south would be pushed along by the wind in their sails.

The Old Kingdom was a time of great economic growth, with a strong barter system. Taxation existed in the form of a “cattle count” or any other produce available. However, farmers had little left over after once taxes were paid. Tax collectors stored taxed goods in royal storehouses. The king would use these goods to pay his officials and workers, and give gifts to temples.

Foreign trade developed from the Egyptians’ desire for luxury goods. Caravans, usually under army escort, would travel to desert oases to obtain pigments, wine, woven grass mats and baskets. The Egyptians traded with Syria and Palestine for timber and, from Nubia, obtained gold, diorite, ivory

and amethyst. Syria supplied the especially high quality cedar used for furniture and shipbuilding. Byblos, an important trading centre near Beirut in Lebanon, was where the Egyptians improved their shipbuilding skills. It was largely through the mutual exchange of goods, rather than military conquests, which allowed Egypt to obtain the resources it needed.

This, however, was not always the case in Egypt's foreign policy. If attempts at trade failed, a military expedition would be mounted. In the Second Dynasty, Kha'sekhem successfully used military power to massacre 48,000 foreigners. Records state that enemies were 'smitten', 'cowed' or 'put to fight', and survivors brought to Egypt as prisoners. Later, the city was 'put to fire' and destroyed.

Memphis was the industrial centre of the Old Kingdom with major workshops located there. Egyptians developed the potter's wheel, and looms for weaving linen. Carpenters and woodworkers made fine chairs, beds, chests, boxes and coffins, using cedar and ebony. Stonemasons carved magnificent statues out of stone using simple tools. Metalworkers employed labourers to blow air, through papyrus tubes, to create the sufficiently hot fires necessary for smelting. Copper was the most commonly used metal, with some evidence of the limited use of bronze and iron.

Many technological advances were made during this period. Time was measured with water clocks, with star clocks used for rituals. The Egyptians also had a sophisticated system of weights and measurements. Mathematically, they could calculate area, volume and fractions. Geometry in particular was important in the design of the pyramids, their most enduring legacy.

RELIGION Chapter Heading

THE ROLE OF KINGSHIP (supered title)

The pharaoh was regarded as the earthly form of the falcon-god Horus, and was deemed divine. He was the Son of Re, the sun god, the most important Egyptian god. He was the chief priest of all religious cults, and, upon his death, was associated with the god Osiris of the Underworld. At the annual *Heb-Sed Festival*, the pharaoh's prowess and physical ability to rule was demonstrated. In the Old Kingdom, it was believed that only the king and his queen entered the afterlife with the gods. The Royal Family and nobles could share in the Pharaoh's afterlife by being buried near to him. The pyramids they built enabled the pharaoh's return to the gods. For commoners the afterlife was separate from that of the Pharaohs and the gods.

GODS, GODDESSES AND CULTS (supered title)

There were hundreds of local deities in each community with many similar characteristics and functions.

Early gods took the form of animals and objects, but were later represented with human bodies and animal heads. The importance of the sun's cycle led to the emergence of the *Heliopolitan cult*, or the solar cult of *Re*, in the Fifth Dynasty. The priests of Re created Egypt's official religion, and the pharaoh was proclaimed *Son of Re*. Elaborate sun-temples were erected to Re, the father of all pharaohs.

Re was the most important deity, while other influential gods were *Hapi*, the spirit of the Nile, and *Osiris*, the energy behind the flood and new growth. The Fifth Dynasty identified *Osiris* with the dead pharaoh and the underworld. *Horus*, the son of Osiris and Isis, was the falcon god, and the pharaoh was Horus on earth. *Atum* was the creator god, later associated with Re, to become Atum-Re.

MYTHS & LEGENDS (supered title)

In the Old Kingdom, there were two major creation myths. In the first one, *KHEPRI*, god of the rising sun, created the watery abyss *NU* from nothing. From this, he drew all the materials he needed for creation. Magically, land appeared, the foundation of Ma'at: law, order and stability.

In the second myth, out of the swirling, watery chaos of *NU* emerged *ATUM*, the sun god of Heliopolis. Atum created a hill to stand upon, thus symbolising the coming of light and darkness.

Osiris became pharaoh and his sister, Isis, his queen after the death of their father, Geb. Their brother Seth, the god of the desert, killed Osiris out of jealousy. Seth placed Osiris' remains in a box and set it afloat on the Nile, and became pharaoh. Isis, with the help of other gods, found Osiris' remains and restored him to life. Osiris had cheated death and became god of the afterlife. Horus, the son of Osiris and Isis, who became pharaoh, overthrew Seth.

DEATH & BURIAL

Chapter Heading

BUILDING OF THE PYRAMIDS (supered title)

The Ancient Egyptians constructed enormous cemeteries to ascend into the afterlife. During the Third Dynasty, the pharaoh Djoser (2667-2648 BC) oversaw great innovations in tomb construction. The Step Pyramid he built at Saqqara was a natural progression from mud-brick mastabas, with new mastabas added onto lower ones to form a step pattern.

Pyramid building reached its zenith during the reign of Khufu around 2560 BC. Over 20 years, he constructed the Great Pyramid at Giza. Stone was

quarried nearby and transported either by boat or dragged to the construction site. Stone was also imported from Nubia, the Sinai and Aswan and transported along the Nile. The base of the Great Pyramid measured over 54,000 square metres. There are many theories to explain how the blocks, weighing 20 to 80 tonnes, were set in place. It has been estimated that 800 tonnes of stone were laid each day. Teams of workers dragged sleds that carried the stone. At any one time, 100,000 men were employed. Many of these were rural workers, who had little else to do during the annual flooding of the Nile. When the Great Pyramid was completed, approximately two million stone blocks had been used and it measured 156 metres in height. The surface was a solid core of tura limestone. Inside were the burials chambers of the pharaoh and queen. The pharaoh's sarcophagus was a decorated stone coffin, carved from red granite transported from Aswan. The chambers were sealed when the sand supporting the keystones was released. Surrounding the pyramid there were funerary boat pits, and mastabas for 64 of Khufu's officials.

Located next to The Great Pyramid are two others. The Pyramid of Khafre, one of Khufu's successors, appears to be the largest, but it is mounted on a raised platform. Khafre's pyramid was 145 metres high, and the limestone casing at the top remains. Khafre is commonly considered the builder of the Great Sphinx. The other pyramid belongs to Khafre's successor, Menkaure.

These pyramids were part of a vast cemetery complex, comprising smaller pyramids, mortuary temples and mastabas.

Near Khafre's temple, facing east to the rising sun stands the Sphinx. It is believed that the face of the Sphinx is carved in Khafre's image, and bears the royal head cloth. This great stone monument guards the entire Giza complex, and has the body of a lion, a symbol of the king's power. The lion was also associated with Re, reinforcing the connection between the earthly ruler and the deities. The Sphinx has suffered over time, buried by the desert and believed to have been used for target practice by Napoleon's army, with cannon shells blowing away part of the nose.

FUNERAL CUSTOMS, RITUALS & TEXTS (supered title)

The Egyptians believed that, upon death, the spirit or Ka would reside in the body for eternity. Everything they did with the body ensured that it remained intact after death. To accomplish this, a precise mummification ritual was established. If the internal organs were left in place, the body would decay, regardless of attempts to preserve it with resin-soaked strips of linen. All organs, with the exception of the heart, were removed.

The brain was extracted with a hook through the nasal cavity, and all were placed in Canopic chests or jars. A salt-like compound was used to dry out

the body. Pads of cloth made the body look more life-like, and special treatments such as plaster were used to enhance facial features. Anubis, the jackal-headed god of the dead and protector of the necropolis, is frequently depicted in these rituals. The heart was seen as the organ that governed reason, emotion and personality. It was left in place, with a heart shaped scarab covering it, for a judgement ceremony held before Osiris, known as the Weighing of the Heart. This determined whether or not the deceased would gain passage to the afterlife.

Once mummified, a pharaoh was taken to his tomb with solemn, well-rehearsed observances. The procession travelled across the Nile to the west bank. Priests recited spells and incantations, sacrifices were made and the coffin was taken to the burial site. At the *Opening of the Mouth* ceremony, the pharaoh received food and speech, to enable the *Ba*, or soul, to travel to the afterlife. The soul and the spirit had to re-unite after death to allow successful passage to the afterlife.

Within the five Saqqara pyramids are found the **PYRAMID TEXTS**. These are a collection of spells, magical incantations and hymns, comprising a total of 757 utterances. The texts were to ensure a happy afterlife for the pharaoh and queen. Also depicted were directions to navigate the hazardous journey to the afterlife. With the help of spells, the pharaoh could accompany Re on his daily voyage across the sky.

DECORATIVE FEATURES OF NOBLES' TOMBS (supered title)

The pharaohs were not the only members of society privileged enough to afford ornate tombs. High-ranking officials and nobles had tombs containing scenes from everyday life. A hunter returns with captured birds. Metalworkers are depicted manufacturing jewellery. In the tomb of the nobleman Ti, is an illustration of workmen shaping the hull of a boat. This signified that they would continue to work for him in the afterlife. Also included in tombs were wood and plaster sculptures. The ancient Egyptians believed that painted images could carry out a symbolic function, while models would be magically re-constituted to full size and animated to service their master's needs in the afterlife.

CULTURAL LIFE Chapter Heading

ART

The Old Kingdom is referred to as the 'golden age' of Egyptian art. This period created the basic tenets of Egyptian art for millennia to come. Ptah, the chief god of Memphis, was the god of arts and crafts.

Early sculptors used wood and ivory, but skills were later developed to fashion hard stones such as diorite and basalt. Limestone was the most

popular material for sculpture. Statues were made to accompany their owners into the afterlife.

Wall Reliefs found in the tombs of nobles have several common themes. As well as the tomb owner and his wife, there were agricultural scenes, fishing, hunting, music, dancing and artisans at work. The pharaohs and gods were depicted as larger than ordinary people, especially their enemies. Reliefs were always drawn with the head and feet turned sideways, in the same direction. The shoulders and arms were always in the normal position. Although the head was side on, the eye was drawn facing the front. Reliefs were sculpted in stages. The scene was etched with ink, and then sculptors carved with copper chisels. In the Fourth Dynasty, the use of coloured paste inlays appears to have been a short-lived artistic experiment.

WRITING & LITERATURE

In hieroglyphics eternity is represented by these symbols. Only the ruling class initially used hieroglyphics and hieratic script. Later, scribes were trained in literacy skills, enabling them to rise in the bureaucracy. Scribes are represented as the Ibis-headed Toth. In making *PAPYRUS* paper, the pith was soaked, cut into thin strips, and placed into a frame. A second layer was laid on top, at right angles to the first. The papyrus was beaten to release water and starch, which acted as a bonding agent. Weights flattened the sheets while they dried. Papyrus grew abundantly in the delta region and had both symbolic and practical applications. Symbolically, it was the plant that flourished on the primeval mound of creation myths. It was the heraldic emblem of Lower Egypt, and the papyrus motif featured prominently in temple architecture. On a practical level, the course outer layer of the stem was used for boat building, ropes, matting and sandals.

Pyramid texts, prayers and rituals were not the only examples of literature. The Westcar Papyrus, a series of five stories, provides insight into the mystical and superstitious elements of Old Kingdom society and customs. *Instructions of Ptahhotpe*, written by the Fifth Dynasty vizier, illustrates the humanistic values of Egyptian society, such as kindness, justice, truthfulness, moderation and self-control.

EVERYDAY LIFE Chapter Heading

For the Egyptian Royal Family and the nobility, their lives were effortless and filled with luxury. Servants tended to their every need and their free time was occupied with leisurely pursuits, with board games extremely popular. The Pharaoh, apart from his military duties, would spend much of his time hunting, fishing and participating in contact sports. However, the vast majority of Ancient Egyptians were peasants, toiling in the fields. Religious

festivals to honour the Gods, however, gave them a few days' respite from their tasks.

The staple diet consisted of bread and beer, consumed by all classes and ages. Archaeological studies have revealed that particles of the stone used in milling grain for bread, were incorporated in the bread itself, leading to tooth wear and decay. Fish, vegetables, wild duck and poultry, as well as milk and cheese were also a part of the diet. Wine and red meats were considered luxury items, only for the rich.

Due to the extremely hot Egyptian climate, clothing was kept to a minimum. Social class determined the style. Wealthy men wore a white pleated kilt-type garment made of linen, while women wore ankle-length sheaths of the same fabric. They also wore sandals, and indulged in make-up and jewellery. Priests wore a loincloth with a narrow-sleeved shirt. Lector and Sem priests wore leopard skins tied over their shoulders. Lower classes favoured simple and modest loincloths.

There is limited knowledge of housing during the Old Kingdom. Homes were made of mud brick, with floors of hard clay, and each had a kitchen and corridors between rooms. Inner walls were plastered and decorated. This model illustrates a stairway, leading to a flat roof used as a terrace, and for sleeping in the heat of summer. Furniture consisted of armchairs, beds and chests, with extensive use of cushions. The rich had beds, which were couches topped with mattresses. Poorer classes slept on reed mats on the floor of their simple dwellings. Egyptians had tables and crockery made of pottery and stone. Lamps or candles provided lighting.

Class determined occupation. The nobility filled positions in the political bureaucracy as officials, scribes, architects and overseers. Priests, male and female, were either permanent or part-time. Artisans and craftsmen formed a middle class. Manual labour was confined to the peasant class. The women were mainly occupied with domestic chores and helped their men at harvest time.

LEGACY OF THE OLD KINGDOM Chapter Heading

The Old Kingdom was the first of the three great Pharaonic eras. During this time, Egypt became a sophisticated civilization under the unifying power of the Pharaoh.

Excavation continues to reveal the secrets of ancient Egypt. Near Khufu's Great Pyramid, one of his funeral boats was uncovered in 1954, 4,500 years after the pyramid's completion. The pyramids of Giza, however, remain the Old Kingdom's most striking legacy.