



The Old Kingdom Forms

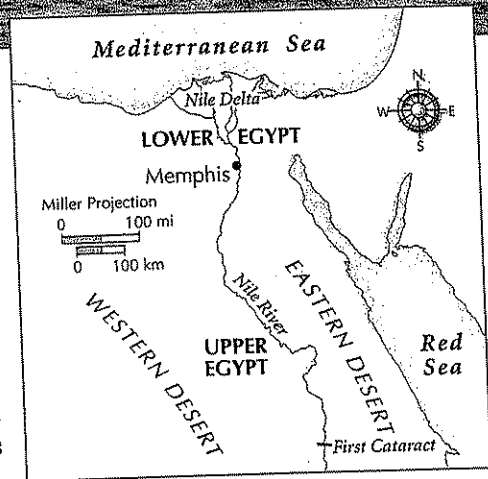
Scholars divide the history of ancient Egypt into three main periods: the Old Kingdom (about 2575 B.C.–2130 B.C.), the Middle Kingdom (about 1938 B.C.–1630 B.C.), and the New Kingdom (about 1539 B.C.–1075 B.C.). Although power passed from one dynasty, or ruling family, to another, the land generally remained united.

A Strong Government Takes Hold During the Old Kingdom, Egyptian kings, later called **pharaohs** (FEHR ohz), organized a strong, centralized state. Pharaohs played key roles in government and religion. Egyptians believed each pharaoh was a god. He held absolute power, owning and ruling all the land in the kingdom. However, the pharaohs were seen as human as well as divine. The people expected their pharaohs to behave morally and judged the pharaohs for their deeds.

Pharaohs of the Old Kingdom took pride in preserving justice and order. They did so by means of a **bureaucracy**—a system of government that includes different job functions and levels of authority. In the Egyptian bureaucracy, a pharaoh depended on a **vizier** (vih ZEER), or chief minister, to supervise the business of government. Under the vizier, various departments looked after such matters as tax collection, farming, and the all-important irrigation system. Thousands of scribes carried out the vizier's instructions.

Ptah-hotep (ptah HOH tep), who lived around 2450 B.C. in Egypt, was a vizier to a pharaoh who took an interest in training young officials. Based on his vast experience of government, he wrote a book, *Instructions of the Vizier Ptah-hotep*, in which he emphasized the importance of being humble and honest, obedient to one's father and superiors, and fair in dealing with other officials of all ranks.

The Great Pyramids Are Built During the Old Kingdom, Egyptian pharaohs built many necropolises (neh KRAHP uh lis iz), or cemeteries, containing majestic pyramids in the areas surrounding Memphis. Today, the best known are the Great Pyramids that still stand at Giza. Tombs within the pyramids were considered homes in which the deceased would live for eternity. Because Egyptians believed in an afterlife, they preserved the bodies of their dead rulers and provided them with everything they would need in their new lives. Building each of the pyramids took so long that often a pharaoh would begin to build his tomb as soon as he came to power.



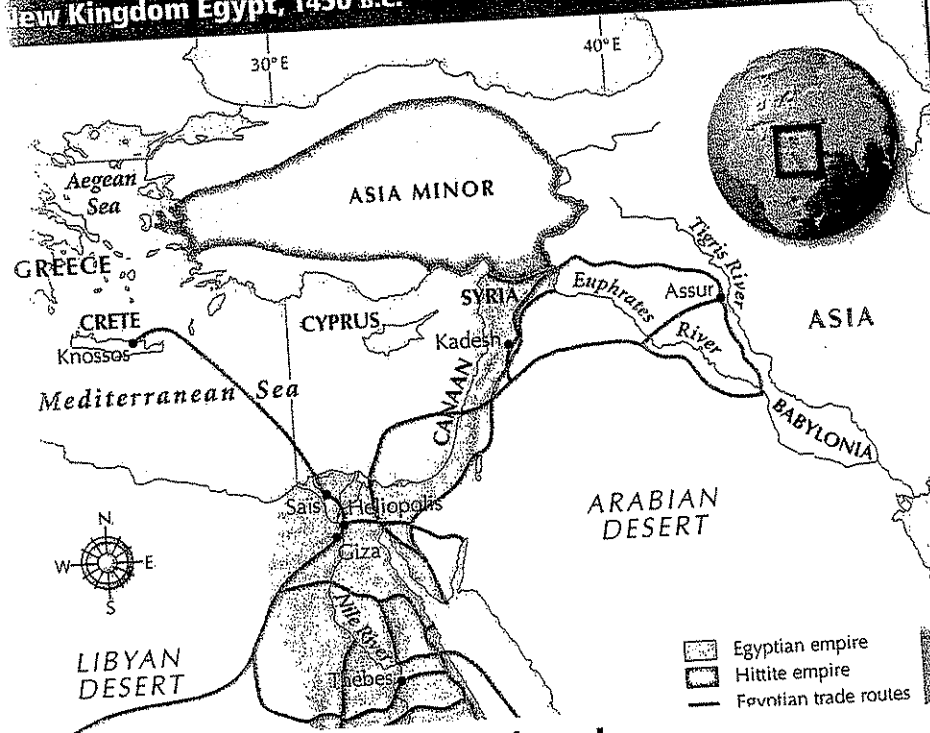
World's Longest River

As the world's longest river, the Nile extends about another 3,600 miles south of its first cataract, which you can see on the map. Egyptians today continue to rely on the river (above) to provide water for agriculture as well as for transportation. *Do you think Egypt was the only civilization to arise along the Nile? Why or why not?*

CLASS
SET

✓ **Checkpoint** How was Egyptian government structured during the Old Kingdom?

New Kingdom Egypt, 1450 B.C.



Map Skills Under the control of Thutmose III (below), Egypt's borders expanded into the eastern Mediterranean region.

- 1. Locate** (a) Nile River (b) Nubia (c) Giza (d) Syria
- 2. Movement** What were the northernmost areas reached by Egyptian traders?
- 3. Make Comparisons** How did the Hittite empire compare in size to the Egyptian empire around 1450 B.C.? Which do you think was more advantageously situated?

The Turbulent Middle Kingdom

Power struggles, crop failures, and the cost of building the pyramids all contributed to the collapse of the Old Kingdom. Then, after more than a century of disunity, new pharaohs reunited the land, ushering in a new era, the Middle Kingdom.

The Middle Kingdom was a turbulent period. The Nile did not rise as regularly as it had in the past. Corruption and rebellions were common. Still, strong rulers did organize a large drainage project, creating vast new stretches of arable, or farmable, land. In addition, Egyptian armies occupied part of Nubia (also known as Kush), a gold-rich land to the south about which you will read more in a later chapter. Traders also had greater contacts with the peoples of the Middle East and the Mediterranean island of Crete.

About 1700 B.C., foreign invaders called the Hyksos (HIK soh) occupied the Nile delta region. Although the Hyksos took over the governance of Egypt, there was little conflict between the new rulers and the Egyptian people. The Hyksos awed the Egyptians with their horse-drawn war chariots. In time, the Egyptians mastered this new military technology. The Hyksos, in turn, were impressed by Egyptian civilization. They soon adopted Egyptian customs, beliefs, and even names. Finally, after more than 100 years of Hyksos rule, new Egyptian leaders arose and established the New Kingdom.

✓ **Checkpoint** In what ways was the Middle Kingdom turbulent?

New Kingdom Egypt Grows Strong

During the years of New Kingdom, a number of powerful and ambitious pharaohs created a large empire. At its height around 1450 B.C., the Egyptian empire reached as far north as Syria and the Euphrates River. The New Kingdom proved to be an age of conquest that brought Egyptians into greater contact with peoples in southwestern Asia as well as other parts of Africa.

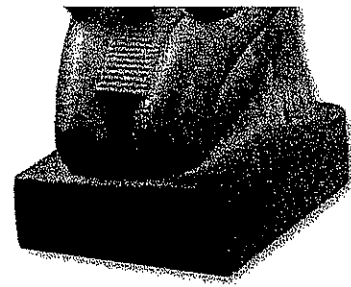


New Kingdom pharaoh
Thutmose III

Powerful Rulers Control Egypt During the New Kingdom, Egypt's first female ruler took charge. Her name was **Hatshepsut** (haht SHEP soot), and she exercised all the rights of a pharaoh. From about 1472 B.C. to 1458 B.C., she encouraged trade with eastern Mediterranean lands and along the Red Sea coast of Africa. Her stepson, **Thutmose III** (thoot MOH suh), took over as pharaoh once he reached adulthood. A great military general, Thutmose III stretched Egypt's borders to their greatest extent ever.

Much later, **Ramses II** (RAM seez) became pharaoh of the New Kingdom. He ruled for 66 years, from 1279 B.C. to 1213 B.C., and during that time pushed Egyptian control northward again as far as Syria. He may be the best known of the Egyptian rulers because he boasted of his conquests on numerous temples and monuments, although his greatest reported victory may not actually have taken place.

Egypt Battles With Its Neighbors During the reign of Ramses II, Egypt fought a number of fierce battles against the Hittites of Asia Minor. After years of fighting, the Egyptians and the Hittites signed a peace treaty, the first such document in history known to have survived. It declared that Egypt and the Hittites "shall be at peace and in brotherhood forever."



New Kingdom pharaoh
Thutmose III