

PART I EARLIEST CIVILIZATIONS

Chapter 2 Egypt and the Kingdom of Kush

I. The First and Second Dynasties (3100–2686 B.C.)

1. The natural barriers of deserts and sea insulated Egypt from invading armies and migrating populations.
2. Unlike the Euphrates River of the Mesopotamian civilization, easy navigation of the Nile gave access to the entire region and was a natural aid to central government.
3. By 3100 B.C. the whole length of the river came under the control of a central government ruled by a man named Menes.
4. Egypt had its first central government with a single capital 500 years before Sumeria.
5. The Egyptian ruler was considered a divine protector of natural forces whose will deserved unquestioned obedience.

II. The Old Kingdom (2686–2180 B.C.)

1. Little is known about the Egyptian civilization prior to the Third Dynasty, the first of the Old Kingdom dynasties.
2. From this time forward numerous records attest to the administration of this advanced society.

B. Egyptian Writing

1. Like Mesopotamia, Egypt began using a system of writing in about 3100 B.C.
2. Writing was essential to Egypt's complex administrative system.
3. Egyptian pictograph writing, called hieroglyphics, was cumbersome and difficult to master.
4. The discovery of the Rosetta stone by a French scholar in 1822 enabled modern translators to unlock the meaning of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic writing.
5. The Rosetta Stone contained a decree in three languages, including Greek.
6. Syrians or Palestinians living in Egypt developed an alphabetical system of writing in about 1900 B.C.

B. Egyptian Religion

1. Egyptian religion combined hundreds of gods who would sometimes combine to form new gods.
2. Egyptian theology grew ever larger through accretion. New gods and doctrines were added without discarding older, contradicting tenets.
3. When the Greeks conquered Egypt in 332 B.C., they adopted some of the Egyptian gods.
4. Egyptian gods were considered benevolent.
5. The Egyptians believed in an afterlife for those judged worthy by the gods.

6. The Egyptian Book of the Dead includes rituals and magic spells to help people pass into the afterlife.

C. Pyramids: The Zoser Pyramid Complex

1. Egyptian pharaohs of the Old Kingdom had elaborate palaces, but only the pyramids made of stone survive.
2. The stepped pyramid of Saqqara, c. 2650 B.C., was a tomb for the pharaoh Zoser.
3. The stepped pyramid of Saqqara served as the prototype for the true pyramids that were built later.
4. The most famous pyramids are the tombs of Cheops, Chephren, and Mycerinus (2600-2500 B.C.) and are located a few miles north of Saqqara.
5. The Chepren pyramid complex includes the famous Sphinx.

D. Sculpture

1. The sculptural artifacts of the Zoser complex display artistic conventions that endured throughout the Old Kingdom period.
2. Figures were traditionally rendered with head, legs, and hips in profile but with the eyes and shoulders displayed frontally.
3. Human likeness is idealized in the sculpture from this period and displays personality and emotion as well.

III. The Middle Kingdom (2140–1786 B.C.)

1. Little is known about the cause of the breakup of the Old Kingdom or what happened in the intervening decades prior to the emergence of the Middle Kingdom.
2. Egypt reestablished itself with a central government and as the dominant regional power by the Eleventh Dynasty rulers Mentuhetep II and his son Mentuhetep III.
3. These pharaohs and those that followed encouraged worship of the sun god of Thebes, Amon-Ra.
4. This prosperous era was marked by expansion with the Egyptians subjugating Nubia and the Sudan and expanding its own territory into Palestine.
5. The decay of the Middle Kingdom is attributed to the infiltration of Egypt by the Hyksos of Palestine, an advanced people who introduced new technologies to Egypt.
6. The humiliation of proud Egypt being dominated by foreigners had a lasting impact on Egyptian culture.

IV. The New Kingdom (1570–1085 B.C.)

1. The expulsion of the Hyksos marked the beginning of the New Kingdom.
2. Soon after, the pharaohs dedicated their energies to conquering Nubia and the entire Eastern Mediterranean.
3. The Egyptians garrisoned troops in these conquered areas and under the “Napoleon of Egypt,” Thutmose III (1504–1450 B.C.), the Egyptians crossed the Euphrates into Mesopotamia.

A. Queen Hatshepsut (c. 1504–1482 B.C.)

1. Hatshepsut was the daughter, sister, and wife of pharaohs.
2. She ruled first as regent on behalf of her young nephew who was heir to the throne and then ruled in her own right, adopting the title of king instead of queen.
3. Hatshepsut's rule was active and energetic in the tradition of the great pharaohs.
4. The tradition of burying pharaohs in pyramids was past when Hatshepsut ruled.
5. The Temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el Bahari is an impressive structure that commemorates Hatshepsut's life and rule.
6. It was also a time of extraordinary achievement in art, architecture, and painting.

B. The Amarna Period (1417–1352 B.C.)

1. The Amarna period was a time of prosperity and great cultural achievement.
2. The "Amarna letters" are preserved correspondence between the king of Egypt and the kings of Egypt, Babylonia, and the Hittites.
3. Egypt had become a multicultural and multiracial society.
4. The sun god Aten became a central fixture in Egyptian religion during this time.
5. Aten's elevation to the exclusion of other gods was imposed by King Amenophis IV during his reign.
6. Amenophis IV alienated the religious establishment and very likely the populace through his religious zeal for Aten.
7. After Amenophis' death, King Tutankhaton resumed Egypt's traditional polytheism.

C. Decay of the New Kingdom

1. After Tutankhamen, Egypt sought to aggressively defend its expanded borders which included Syria, Palestine, parts of Nubia, and much of the Arabian Desert.
2. Invasions from the west and from Mediterranean islands put Egypt in a defensive posture, and the empire began losing control of its colonies.

V. The Third Intermediate Period and the Late Period (1085–332 B.C.)

1. During most of the Third Intermediate Period and the Late Period, Egypt survived as a divided country with a Pharaoh in the north at Tanis and another in the south at Thebes.
2. Order was restored for a time when the southern kingdom of Kush in Nubia invaded Egypt at the invitation of the southern Egyptians.
3. The Nubian kings did not reside in Egypt but ruled through their daughters who ruled as virtual kings.
4. The Kushites were forced out by the Assyrians who had to abandon their conquest when their homeland came under siege by the Persians.
5. The Saite period, which followed after the Assyrian occupation (664–525 B.C.), was the last independent dynasty of Egypt.
6. The Persians conquered Egypt in 525 B.C. as did Alexander the Great about a century later.

VI. The Ptolemaic Period (332–30 B.C.)

1. Alexander was hailed as a savior of Egypt for allowing Egypt to revert to the cultural traditions that preceded the Persian conquest.

2. After his death, Alexander's empire was divided among his generals with Egypt going to Ptolemy I.
3. In the following century the upper classes of Egypt became part of the Hellenized society that dominated the Mediterranean from Syria to Spain.
4. A legendary beauty, Cleopatra was the last of the Ptolemaic rulers.
5. In league with Marc Antony, Cleopatra expanded the power of Egypt for a short time but was on the losing side of a civil war that briefly divided the Roman Empire.

VII. Egyptian Music

1. Egyptian literature and wall paintings depict a great variety of musical performances.
2. Classical authors attest to the excellence of Egyptian musical practices and its importance in Egyptian culture.
3. Like Sumerian music, there is much known about Egyptian music but not what it sounded like.
4. Records of some musical instruments go back to the Old Kingdom, and there is evidence of their continuous use.
5. Egyptian music is thought to have influenced the musical development of Greece and Rome.

VIII. Nubia and the Kingdom of Kush

1. Ancient Egyptian wealth and power depended on Egypt's relations with its neighbors in Africa as well as Asia.
2. One of the most important relationships was with the kingdom of Kush, in what is now Sudan.
3. Nubia's history is at times distinct and at others completely intertwined with that of Egypt.

A. Historical Background

1. Nubia and Kush refer to the region and community along the Nile south of Egypt.
2. Kush was the northern most part of this region and its culture and history were intertwined with that of Egypt.
3. Kush dominated the middle reaches of the Nile for a thousand years.
4. During the Napatan period (750–270 B.C.), Kush invaded Egypt, first taking control of the Egyptian city of Memphis and eventually the entire country in 714 B.C.
5. Overtime the Kushites lost control of Egypt and had to move south; they left Napata and the city of Meroe became their principal city.
6. The Meroitic Period went from 270 B.C. to 350 A.D.
7. Meroe was culturally and geographically more separate from Egypt.

B. Population and Social Structure

1. The people of the Meroe region had dark skin and are probably the ancestors of the Nubians of today.
2. The society was strictly stratified on the basis of wealth.
3. The Meroe society actively participated in the ancient slave trade.
4. Artisans were accomplished and innovative in pottery and other crafts.

- C. The Kushite Monarchy and the Importance of Women
 - 1. Succession of the kingship was through the maternal line.
 - 2. The ruler was chosen from members of the royal family with the queen mother having a strong influence.
 - 3. Queen mothers also played an important function in the coronation ritual.
 - 4. In the second century B.C. there was a series of Meroitic ruling queens.

- D. Language and Writing in Napata and Meroe
 - 1. Egyptian was the official language of Kush.
 - 2. Tributes to Piye, King of Napata, reveal some of what is known about Kushite culture.
 - 3. Eventually, with the Kushite shift southward, there was a shift to the Meroitic language of which little is known or comprehended.

- E. The Art of Napata and Meroe
 - 1. The Kushites achieved distinction in many artistic areas, notably architecture, construction, pottery, and sculpture.
 - 2. The Twenty-fifth Dynasty King Taharqa built and refurbished numerous temples, some in Egypt, but most in Nubia.

- F. Kush and the Rest of Africa
 - 1. Kush was an important trading corridor for central and southern Africa to the outside world.
 - 2. The extent to which Kush was an important transmitter of culture and technology to the rest of Africa is still open to conjecture, especially with respect to the West African civilizations.

- G. The Disappearance of Kush as a State
 - 1. Little is known about the disappearance of the Kush state in about 250 A.D.
 - 2. The State may have broken up into three independent kingdoms, Nobatia, Makouria, and Alwa, of which little is known.