

◀ Twin statues of the pharaoh Ramses II guard an ancient Egyptian temple.

# The Ancient Egyptian Pharaohs

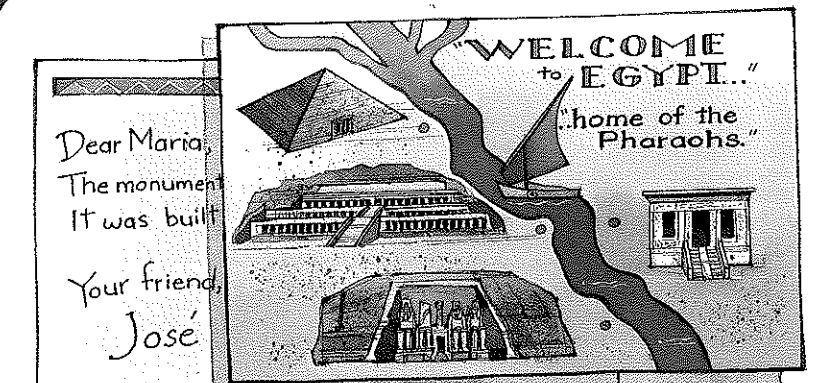
## 8.1 Introduction

In the last chapter, you learned how early Egyptians settled in the Nile River valley. In this chapter, you will visit ancient Egypt and meet four of its leaders, called **pharaohs**.

In 1922, archeologists discovered the tomb of a pharaoh known as King Tutankhaten, or King Tut. Inside a small burial chamber, they found three coffins nested inside each other. The smallest coffin was made of solid gold. It held the king's mummy. (A mummy is a body that has been preserved after death to keep it from decaying.) On the mummy's head was a magnificent golden mask. Jewelry and good luck charms lay on the mummy and in the wrappings that protected it. Other rooms of the tomb were filled with statues, weapons, furniture, and even a chariot.

The treasures in King Tut's tomb provided an amazing glimpse into ancient Egypt. Other pharaohs also left behind fabulous riches and artwork. Many of them built great monuments to celebrate their accomplishments. Like King Tut's tomb, these artifacts have much to teach us about this ancient civilization.

In this chapter, you will learn about three important periods in ancient Egyptian history. They are called the **Old Kingdom**, the **Middle Kingdom**, and the **New Kingdom**. Then you will meet four of the pharaohs who ruled during these periods. You will learn about their achievements and explore some of the monuments they left behind.



Use this postcard as a graphic organizer to help you learn about ancient Egyptian pharaohs and their achievements.



## 8.2 Ancient Egypt and Its Rulers

Ancient Egypt enjoyed three long periods of stability and unity under the rule of pharaohs. Historians call these periods the Old Kingdom, the Middle Kingdom, and the New Kingdom.

The Old Kingdom lasted from about 2700 to 2200 B.C.E. During this time, early pharaohs set up a strong central government. They also built great **pyramids** as tombs for themselves. Some historians call this time the Age of Pyramids.

The Middle Kingdom (about 2000 to 1800 B.C.E.) is sometimes called the Period of Reunification because it followed years of chaos and disunity. During this era Egyptians made many great achievements in literature, art, and architecture.

The New Kingdom (about 1600 to 1100 B.C.E.) is often called Egypt's Golden Age. During this time of peace and stability,

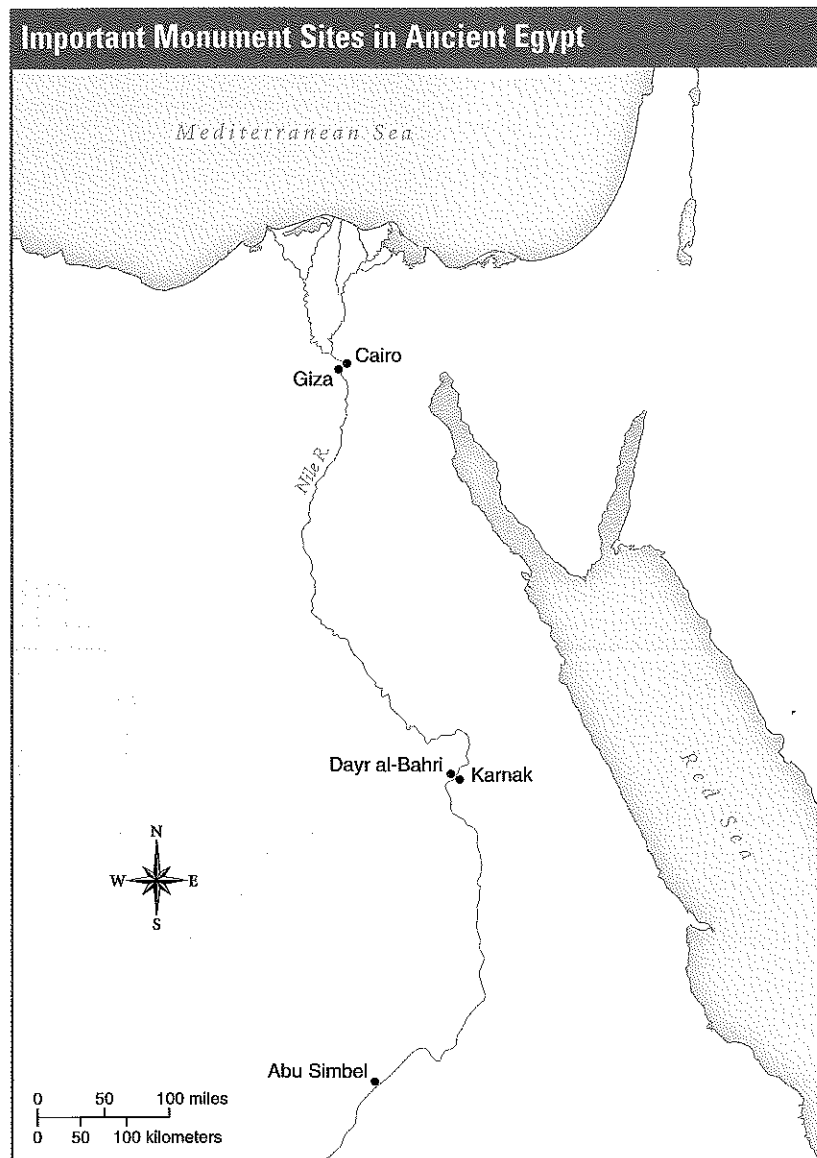
Egypt's power reached its height. Pharaohs increased trade and built gigantic monuments.

As in Mesopotamia, religion played a central role in Egypt's social and political order. The pharaohs were believed to be gods. They owned all the land and were responsible for the people's well-being. They were kings, generals, and religious leaders, all at once.

After they died, the pharaohs were thought to enter an afterlife that would never end. Their great tombs were built to last forever.

The pharaohs built other monuments to glorify their power and success. The map shows the locations of some of the greatest monuments. Let's find out more about these structures and the pharaohs who built them.

**pyramid** a huge, triangular-shaped monument of ancient Egypt built around a tomb



Khufu began construction on the Great Pyramid as soon as he became pharaoh.

## 8.3 Pharaoh Khufu: The Pyramid Builder

The pharaoh Khufu ruled from about 2551 to 2528 B.C.E., during the Old Kingdom period. Today he is best known as the builder of a famous pyramid.

Not much is known about what Khufu was like. Some stories describe him as a cruel, harsh ruler. Others say he was powerful but kind.

We do know that Khufu helped establish the pharaoh as a central authority. For example, he kept strict control over Egypt's food supply. This involved overseeing the harvest and storing extra grain. He controlled a large network of government officials who carried out his laws. Khufu emphasized his supreme power by declaring himself a god.

Khufu and other Old Kingdom pharaohs had magnificent pyramids built as tombs for themselves and their families. Khufu himself was responsible for the building of the Great Pyramid at Giza. It is one of the wonders of the ancient world.

The Great Pyramid sat at the center of a huge complex of temples, statues, monuments, and smaller tombs. It was made of more than 2 million stone blocks that fit together perfectly. Inside, tunnels led to several burial chambers. The king's chamber had six roofs to hold up the weight of the stones above it.

Building the Great Pyramid was an amazing feat. No one knows exactly how the Egyptians did it. The pyramid took more than 20 years to complete. Khufu maintained full control of the building project. He organized and fed thousands of workers. The completed pyramid was a stunning monument to Egyptian engineering.



This three-inch-high ivory statue is a portrait of Khufu.

#### 8.4 Pharaoh Senusret I: Patron of the Arts

The pharaoh Senusret I ruled from about 1971 to 1926 B.C.E., during the Middle Kingdom. He was a strong leader who ruled a stable, unified Egypt. Art, literature, and architecture flourished during his reign.

Craftspeople thrived under Senusret's rule. The pharaoh controlled mines loaded with gold, copper, and gems such as purple amethyst. Craftspeople fashioned these materials into beautiful pieces of jewelry. Bracelets and necklaces were often highly detailed. They were then decorated with stones like turquoise.

Some of the greatest works in Egyptian literature were written during Senusret's reign. "The Story of Sinuhe" tells of a young

official named Sinuhe who overhears a plot to kill the pharaoh. Fearing for his own life, Sinuhe flees Egypt. He thrives in his new land, but he grows very homesick. When a new pharaoh calls him home, Sinuhe returns joyfully.

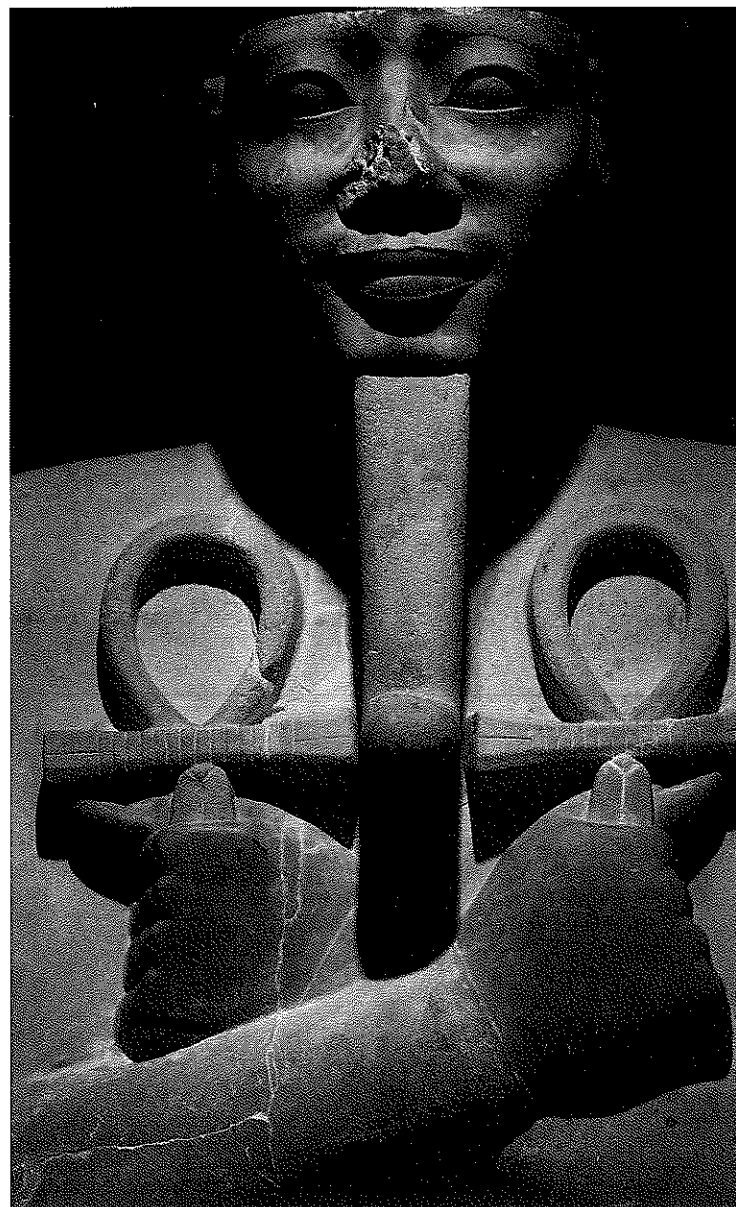
Senusret's greatest accomplishments were in religious architecture. He built and improved many temples, shrines, and religious monuments.

Perhaps Senusret's finest architectural achievement was the White Chapel. (A chapel is a small temple.) It was made of alabaster, a hard white stone. Some historians think the chapel was originally covered in a thin layer of gold.

Beautiful artwork decorated the chapel's pillars. Carved scenes showed the pharaoh with various gods. Birds, animals, and Egyptian symbols were also depicted.

Senusret wanted his memory to live on through his monuments. But almost none of his buildings survived the passage of time. A later pharaoh took the White Chapel apart and used the pieces in a monument of his own. Archeologists later discovered the pieces and reconstructed the White Chapel.

This statue of Senusret shows him clutching an ankh in each hand. The ankh was the Egyptian symbol of immortality, or eternal life.



#### 8.5 Pharaoh Hatshepsut: Promoter of Egyptian Trade

The pharaoh Hatshepsut ruled from about 1473 to 1458 B.C.E. Hatshepsut was Egypt's first female pharaoh. Under her rule, Egyptian art and architecture flourished. She was also known for encouraging trade.

One of Hatshepsut's greatest accomplishments was simply gaining power. Never before had Egypt been ruled by a woman. At first she shared power with her male relatives. However, she soon took over as sole ruler.

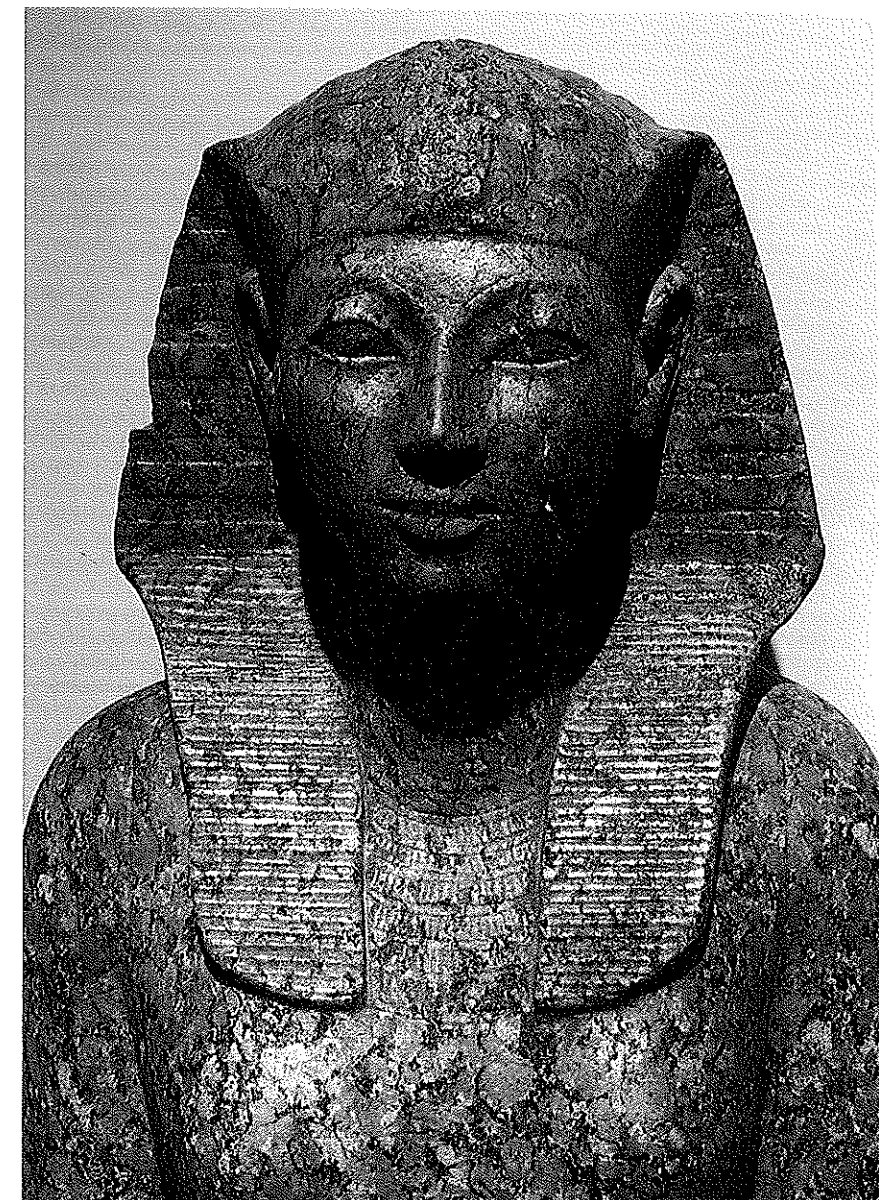
Hatshepsut strengthened her position in several ways. She filled her government with loyal advisors. She demanded the same respect as a male ruler. Sometimes she wore men's clothing. She even wore the fake beard that was worn by male pharaohs. Artists were often instructed to portray her as a man. She also spread stories that her father was a god.

As pharaoh, Hatshepsut promoted trade with other countries. Her biggest trade expedition was to the African kingdom of Punt, at the southern end of the Red Sea. Five ships sailed to Punt bearing gifts and trade goods. In all, over 200 men made the voyage.

Hatshepsut left behind a stunning monument to her reign, a great temple at Dayr al-Bahri. The main part of the temple was built into a cliff above the Nile River. At the entrance were two tall, thin monuments called *obelisks*. The entrance was also graced by 200 sphinx statues. The sphinx is a mythical creature with the body of a lion and the head of a man.

Scenes from Hatshepsut's reign decorated the temple walls. Detailed carvings portrayed the great voyage to Punt. The carvings showed the wondrous things that the pharaoh's traders had brought back to Egypt.

Hatshepsut actively encouraged trade. During her reign, trade helped spread Egyptian influence along the Nile and in nearby lands in the Middle East (western Asia).





## 8.6 Pharaoh Ramses II: Military Leader and Master Builder

The pharaoh Ramses II ruled from about 1290 to 1224 B.C.E., during the New Kingdom. Called Ramses the Great, he is one of the most famous pharaohs. He reigned for more than 60 years, longer than almost any other pharaoh. He is best known for his military leadership and for building numerous monuments.

Ramses did everything in a big way. He had over 100 wives and more than 100 children. He wasn't shy about glorifying himself, either. He had hundreds of statues of himself erected all around Egypt. Some of them were over 60 feet high.

Ramses was a fearless soldier from a young age. He fought alongside his father in various battles. He was made a captain in the Egyptian army at the age of 10.

Ramses tried to defend an Egyptian empire that extended north into Canaan. His most famous military campaigns were against the Hittite Empire in Anatolia (now the country of Turkey). The Hittites constantly threatened Egypt's northern borders. In his most famous battle, Ramses reached a standoff with the Hittites even though he was badly outnumbered.

Ramses was also a peacemaker. He and the Hittites signed the world's first peace treaty. This peace lasted until the Hittite Empire collapsed around 1190 B.C.E.

One of Ramses' most impressive projects was the temple complex at Abu Simbel. The main temple was carved into the side of a cliff on a bank of the Nile River. A smaller temple honored his favorite wife, Nefertari.

This painting shows Ramses II attacking a Hittite fort.



Four giant seated statues of Ramses framed the entrance to the main temple. The figures were sculpted right out of the rock face of the cliff. They are among the finest examples of Egyptian art.

The inside of the temple was also remarkable. Visitors passed through three large rooms, called *halls*, to reach the temple's main room. The room's altar contained statues of Ramses and three Egyptian gods. The temple was built so that twice a year the sun lined up with the entrance. Beams of sunlight would shine down the halls and light up the statues.

Ramses built more temples and monuments than any other pharaoh in history. When he died, he was buried in a tomb that he had had constructed for himself. His is one of the best-preserved mummies ever found.



This is the mummy of Ramses II. Egyptians believed that preserving the bodies of the dead was necessary for the afterlife.

## 8.7 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, you learned about three long periods of stability in ancient Egypt: the Old Kingdom, the Middle Kingdom, and the New Kingdom. You explored the accomplishments of four pharaohs who ruled during these times. Khufu built the Great Pyramid. Senusret encouraged Egyptian art and literature. Hatshepsut, Egypt's first female pharaoh, promoted Egyptian trade. And Ramses the Great was a superior military leader and builder of monuments.

Pharaohs were at the top of Egyptian society. In the next chapter, you'll learn about the rest of Egypt's people and what daily life was like in the New Kingdom.