

About Egyptian Governments and Leaders

Fast Facts

- Egyptians gave us the first known national government.
- Egypt was divided into smaller territories called nomes, each having a local capital.
- Sometime between 1554 and 1304 B.C., the people began calling the king '*pharaoh*', which means 'great house'.
- People believed pharaohs were the human forms of Horus, the god of the sky.
- The Egyptians thought that pharaohs had superhuman wisdom and power.
- Egyptians believed that a pharaoh's crown could shoot flames.
- When a pharaoh was near, everyone had to kneel or lie down to show respect.
- All of Egypt belonged to the pharaoh.
- People paid taxes to the pharaoh by giving part of their crops, serving in the military, or building a monument.
- Since there was not actual money, people exchanged goods. A donkey and two pairs of sandals might equal five pieces of linen and a sack of grain.

The world's first known national government was formed in ancient Egypt when Menes united Upper and Lower Egypt around 3,100 B.C. Menes is now considered to be Egypt's first pharaoh (another name for king or ruler). He started the first dynasty, which is a group of rulers from the same family. Ancient Egypt had 31 dynasties, during which 200 pharaohs reigned, one after the other. Some dynasties lasted for a long time, while others were fairly short.

Pharaohs were not elected by the people. They inherited their positions. Pharaohs often had more than one wife, and the oldest son of the chief wife would become the next pharaoh.

Today, the word pharaoh refers to all rulers of ancient Egypt. However, for much of their history Egyptians did not call their kings pharaohs. The word did not come into use in Egypt until the Eighteenth Dynasty (sometime between 1539 and 1295 B.C.).

Government and religion were very closely connected. Egyptians believed that the pharaohs were all-powerful gods on Earth. Pharaohs were supreme rulers who issued laws, ran the army, managed the economy, and generally handled all other aspects of Egyptian society.

The pharaoh relied on advisers to help run the country. The priests took care of the country's important religious needs. High-ranking officials, called viziers and overseers, assisted the pharaoh in running the government. The officials were responsible for areas such as tax collection, royal granaries, and law courts. Each of the 42 districts in ancient Egypt had its own governor, or monarch. The governors ran the day-to-day operations of their districts. The scribes were another important group of officials. They were ancient Egypt's writers and record keepers. The pharaoh and other government officials had to depend on the hardworking craftspeople and farmers to keep the country running smoothly.

People did not use bills and coins as money. Instead, they paid in goods (usually crops) and services (such as serving in the military, etc.). The pharaoh did not have a bank, but rather a warehouse filled with crops that people had paid as taxes.

