

Ancient Egypt



Historical Overview

Ancient Egyptian civilization officially dates back to 2920 BC when King Menes united Upper and Lower Egypt. However, farmers had developed agriculture in Egypt's rich Nile valley and river delta thousands of years earlier. Continuing through Egypt's three great historical periods — the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms — ancient Egyptian civilization lasted for almost 3,000 years. Exhibiting the world's largest monuments — the great pyramids of Giza — and spectacular monumental sculptures like the Great Sphinx, the land along the Nile River has been compared to an extensive outdoor museum. Advanced astronomers, mathematicians, architects, farmers and artists, the ancient Egyptians developed a culture that exhibited a joy of life and a fascination with the world beyond death. Archaeologists continue to study Egypt's tombs, pyramids, temples and monuments to uncover the mysteries of this remarkable ancient civilization.

Time line

2575 – 2134 BC the Old Kingdom

2040 – 1640 BC the Middle Kingdom

1550 – 1070 BC the New Kingdom

Focus Questions

1. What are some of the wonders of ancient Egypt that have fascinated other cultures throughout history?
2. What was the Rosetta Stone? Why was it a key discovery to Egyptian archaeology?
3. Name Egypt's three kingdoms. Give an important achievement of each.
4. Why is "Lower Egypt" above "Upper Egypt" on a map?
5. Discuss major contributions the ancient Egyptians made to advance civilization.

Vocabulary

civilization — A society that has achieved a high level of culture in government, religion, technology, art and science.

archaeology — The study of past cultures by analyzing their remains.

scarab — A beetle, or an ornament representing a beetle.

pharaoh — A ruler of ancient Egypt worshiped as a god.

pyramid — A stone structure with a square base and four triangular sides built as a tomb in ancient Egypt.

sarcophagus — A stone coffin.

mummification — The process of preserving a body for burial.

mastaba — A flat structure used as a tomb by a pharaoh ; it was the precursor to the pyramid.

Hatshepsut — The name of one of the few women to rule Egypt as pharaoh.

irrigation — A system for watering land.

papyrus — Paper made from reeds that grow along the Nile River.

hieroglyphs — Picture symbols in the Egyptian writing system.

Rosetta Stone — Discovered in Rosetta, Egypt, a stone inscribed in three languages, which helped decode hieroglyphic writing.