

Ancient Egypt

One of the earliest civilizations arose in Egypt about 5,000 years ago. Since most of Egypt is desert, people settled along the Nile River. The fertile soil of the Nile Valley produced good crops. Yearly floods soaked the land and deposited rich soil that we call silt. The river also served as a highway for travel by boat.

The Egyptian ruler was called a **pharaoh**. After the death of a pharaoh, power usually passed to another member of his family. These ruling families were called **dynasties**. There were three periods of Egyptian history called the **Old Kingdom**, **Middle Kingdom** and the **New Kingdom**. [See chart below]

Ancient Egyptian Civilization

OLD KINGDOM 2686 TO 2160 B.C.	MIDDLE KINGDOM 2040 TO 1674 B.C.	NEW KINGDOM 1558 TO 1085 B.C.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pharaohs organize strong governments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Egyptians suffer food shortages	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Powerful pharaohs build large empire
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Egyptians believe pharaoh is a god	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• People rebel	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Queen Hatshepsut become pharaoh, encourages trade
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Old Kingdom also known as Pyramid Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pharaohs drain land for farming	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ramses II conquers Palestine and Syria
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Egyptians build giant pyramids at Giza	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hyksos conquer Egypt	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Egyptian power begins to decline

During the **Old Kingdom**, the pharaohs created a strong government. They also built giant **pyramids**. These burial tombs took many years and millions of stone blocks to build.

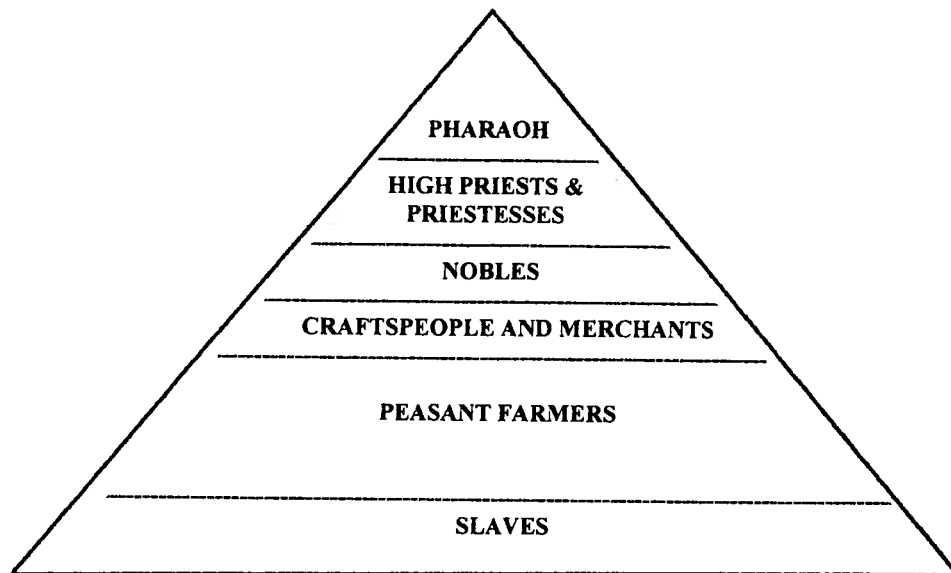
The **Middle Kingdom** was a troubled period. The Nile did not flood regularly, so in many years crops did not grow. Although Egypt conquered other lands, rebellions were common. The invaders, called the Hyksos, defeated the pharaoh's army and gained control of Egypt.

The **New Kingdom** began over a hundred years later when the Egyptians drove out the Hyksos. Powerful pharaohs created a large empire that reached the Euphrates River. Egypt traded with Asia and Africa. Trade and warfare spread Egyptian culture to other countries. In return, those places gave Egyptians new ideas.

Egyptian Civilization

Religion was an important part of everyday life in ancient Egypt. Egyptians believed in many gods and goddesses (polytheistic). They also believed in life after death. They prepared their dead for this afterlife through a preservation process called mummification. The mummies of some pharaohs were buried inside the pyramids.

Egyptian society had its own class system. Egyptians believed that the pharaoh was both a god and a king. He had the highest position in the society. Next were the priests, who served the gods and goddesses. Near the bottom was the biggest group, the peasant farmers. Beneath the peasants were the slaves. Women in Egyptian society had more freedom than in any other ancient civilization.



The Egyptians made many advances in learning and art. In medicine, they learned to cure many illnesses and to perform surgery. Egyptians developed a calendar very similar to the one we use today. They also created picture writing called **hieroglyphics**. Their temples and monuments have survived thousands of years. Egyptian statues and paintings show daily life, ceremonies, and military victories.

Measuring the Year.

The Ancient Egyptians used three different types of calendars: the *agricultural* calendar (for day-to-day use), an *astronomical* calendar and a *lunar* [moon-calendar] for certain rituals and events.

Agricultural Calendar

This was divided into 3 seasons, 4 months for each season

Akhet - inundation - rainy season

Perete - the coming forth of the land out of inundation - growing season

Shemu - harvesting season

Each month counted 30 days, which means that a year had a total of 360 days. The additional 5 days were days celebrating the birthdays of their gods Osiris, Horus, Seth, Isis and Nephtys. To offset a leap year, every 4 years the agricultural calendar would advance 1 day. After some time the inundation season would no longer coincide with the real season. Every 1460 years the agricultural calendar would match the real season.

Astronomical Calendar.

To solve the problem with the agricultural calendar the Egyptians created another calendar that measured time by the stars. They observed the rising of the star Sirius along with the sun, which always coincided with the beginning of the inundation. This is an early solar calendar. Even though the Egyptians did not realize that the earth moved they were able to accurately measure the solar year by the sun and stars.

Moon-Calendar

A moon month is 29 ½ days, the time from one new moon to another. Twelve lunar months make a lunar year of 354 days. Certain rituals had to be performed at given times and during specific lunar phases. Egyptian priests and priestesses kept this calendar and each day was either named after a lunar phase or after a ritual

