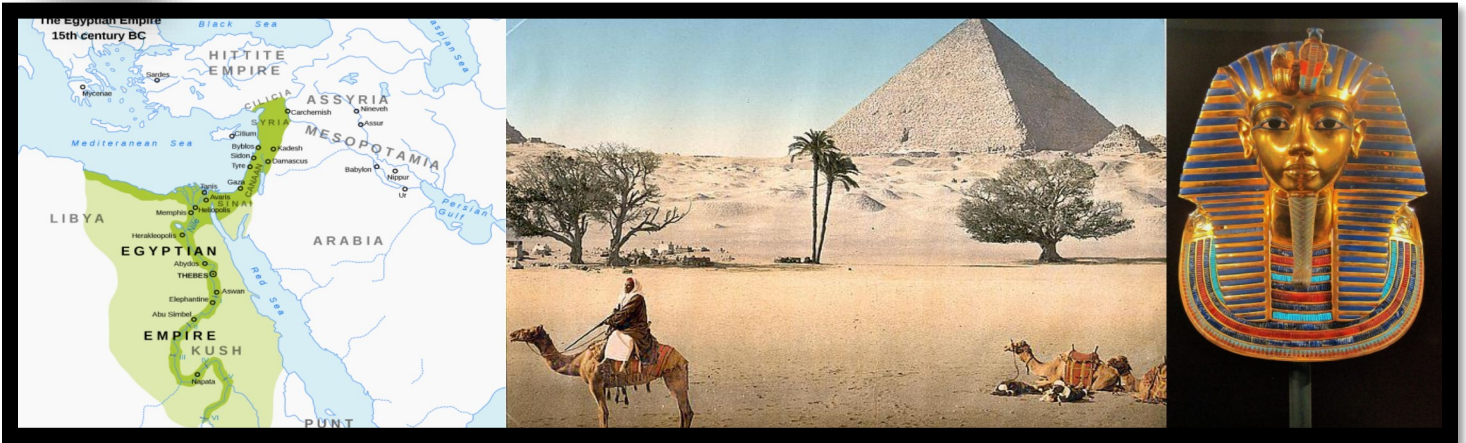


HISTORICAL SNAPSHOT

ANCIENT EGYPT CLOSE READING INVESTIGATION



THE BEGINNING OF EGYPT

House of the Spirit of Ptah is what Egypt literally means. The Greeks called ancient Egypt Aegyptos (A-jip-tahs) which was how they pronounced the Egyptian word that meant “House of the Spirit of Ptah.” So one could say that Egypt was named after one of their first gods. The ancient world called Egypt “Black Land,” or Kemet, because of the rich, fertile silt deposited by the Nile River’s flooding every year during Spring. The Nile runs north for 4,160 miles and empties into the Mediterranean Sea. However, from about 8000 BCE, Egyptians called their country Misr (country) that is the name still used today.

Egypt was well known in the ancient world as a cultural center for all walks of life from religion to science, and from the arts to engineering and agriculture. Artifacts and land conditions of the Sahara Desert are evidence that from the earliest times, this country was a prosperous, agricultural civilization. Around 6000 BCE, nomads (hunter-gatherers rather than settled people) began to settle along the banks of the Nile. However, the written history of the land doesn’t begin until approximately 3400 BCE.

SPECIALTIES SHAPE GOVERNMENTS

The Nile River is the longest river in the world. This 4,160 miles long river stretches from one end of Egypt to the other, was a good water source, and flooded every year leaving very fertile soil for agriculture.

There are several eras (periods of years) that mark ancient Egypt. The first is from 2181 BCE-2040 BCE, known as the *Intermediate Period* when the central government’s power declined so that two centers of government appeared, one in *Upper Egypt* (Thebes) and one in *Lower Egypt* (Hierakonpolis). The two governments fought over who would be master over the country until the Thebeian Dynasty gained ultimate control in 2055 BCE.

The unified government allowed the arts and culture of Egypt to flourish, and this became the *Classical Age*. Yet, uncontrolled flooding of the Nile River caused famine in the land, and that combined with outrageous spending and many building projects weakened the government at Thebes allowing the mysterious **Hyksos** (foreign rulers) to take over. Hardly anything is known about their origin.

WIDE SPREAD INNOVATION

The Hyksos kings’ ushered in numerous innovations such as crop rotations, using horses, chariots, composite bow, ceramics, and developing bronze works. Even with these new ideas, the Hyksos resisted trading with surrounding nations, and this kind of isolation led to economic stagnation (slow growth).

Hatshepsut was Egypt’s first and longest ruling woman pharaoh. Her name means “foremost of the royal ladies.” She reigned for 20 years in the 14th century BCE. Considered one of the most successful of all the pharaohs, she maintained much needed stability in Egypt so it could grow. She opened up

trading by extending Egypt's borders and sending ambassadors to other countries, and this built great wealth for Egypt.

When her stepson became pharaoh, he tried to erase all mention of her name because the thought of the day was that only men were worthy to rule. However, the prosperity begun by Hatshepsut allowed for more leisure time and innovations, such as advances in beer brewing and sports. Doctors made advances in surgery and dentistry, with beer being prescribed for more than 200 diseases and infirmities. Advances in medicine and better hygiene led to healthier people. More elaborate baths were constructed, allowing bathing to become part of the Egyptians daily hygiene practices.

Inventions by the Egyptians include papyrus (a thick paper made from the papyrus plant), black ink, and ink of vibrant colors that remained vibrant even today. Calendars were developed around 3000 BCE using a 12-month year. They based their year on the rising of the star Sirius. Clocks such as sundials and water clocks are attributed to the ancient Egyptians. The water clock was a bowl filled with water with a pinhole in it, placed in a large bowl of water. As a certain number of hours passed the bowl would fill up.

Engineering and construction gave rise to some inventions still used today. The ramp and the lever were invented to help them build the huge pyramids. They gained great knowledge in aerodynamics (how air and water flow around objects) in order to build ships for trading.

They used their knowledge of animal husbandry and metal working to invent the first ox-pulled plow, and used goats to run across the scattered seed in the fields. Crop rotations kept the land fertile so their crops were more fruitful.

Egyptians are credited with inventing the first toothbrushes and toothpaste. They also invented the first breath mints made from essential oils (myrrh, frankincense, and cinnamon) boiled in honey then rolled into small balls easily melting in the mouth.

The art of the Egyptians is well known around the world. First, it includes cosmetics that both men and women used. It not only enhanced their facial

features, but it also protected their skin from the sun. The black kohl worn around their eyes could be the world's first sunshades, protecting eyes from the sun's glare.

Perhaps the best-known pharaoh is Ramses the Great. Ramses II had a huge powerful army of 100,000 men. Very few nations had an army with more than a few thousand.

During his reign, sea pirates, murderous thieves, attacked the heavily loaded ships of Egypt bound for other countries to trade. Ramses II defeated these pirates so trade could flourish.

He lived to be 96 years old reigning from 1279-1213 BCE. When he died, he left 200 wives and concubines, 96 sons, and 60 daughters. Almost every ancient site makes mention of his name, some calling him the Great Ancestor.

SHIFTS IN SPIRITUAL FOCUS

Egypt worshiped many different gods. Many Egyptians believed these gods controlled nature. Hapi controlled floods, Ra controlled the sun, Osiris controlled life after death, and Horus, the sky god, controlled the weather. Egyptians believed each pharaoh was a living god who would rule forever.

But in 1353 BCE, pharaoh Amenhotep IV came into power. He and his wife Nefertiti believed in just one god, Aten. Amenhotep changed his name to Akhenaten, which means "living spirit of Aten."

The most popular deities (gods) had huge numbers of followers making the priests of these gods very rich and influential. These gods ruled almost every aspect of Egyptian daily living. When Akhenaten and Nefertiti insisted everyone worship Aten, it reduced the power and influence of the other priests to almost nothing. This increased the power of the government. Unfortunately, his letters, called the Amarna Letters, show that this pharaoh's interest lay in religious reformation and not in his country's necessities, his people's needs, or in foreign policies.

Akhenaten was the first pharaoh to build tributes to his queen with statues and a temple. He moved the capital from Thebes to Amarna.