

Opening extract from
**Wonders of Egypt: A
Course in Egyptology**

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The Old Kingdom: 2650 to 2450 BC

The kings of Egypt's first royal dynasties were very powerful. Created as a living god, the king was seen as the only person who could speak to the gods and ensure peace and stability throughout the land. To understand the strength and influence of these Old Kingdom kings, you have only to look at their greatest legacy, which still dominates the Egyptian landscape: the pyramids. The famous pyramids at Giza didn't spring from the imagination of an Egyptian architect perfectly formed. Instead, there were several stages of development as various kings experimented with different styles of tomb.



A statue of an Old Kingdom Pharaoh, King Menkaura and Queen Khamerehet.

The illustrations below show the rise and fall in the height of the pyramids. King Snefru was the most prolific builder. He had three pyramids constructed — two based on a stepped design and a third 'true' pyramid.



Step Pyramid of Zoser, 2630 BC
204ft (62m)

Pyramid of Meidum, Snefru, 2600 BC
206ft (92m)

Red Pyramid, Snefru, 2600 BC
344ft (105m)

Red Pyramid, Snefru, 2600 BC
344ft (105m)

Egypt's dry sands have kept many secrets over the years. Lift the flaps to excavate these mounds in the desert.



ACTIVITY: Near the pyramid of Khafra lies a huge sculpture called the Sphinx. This sculpture has the head of a man and the body of a lion and lay covered by sand for centuries. See how much you can find out about the Sphinx in your local library.



Great Pyramid of Khufu, 2550 BC
481ft (147m)

Pyramid of Khafra, 2520 BC
471ft (144m)

Pyramid of Menkaura, 2490 BC
213ft (65m)

The New Kingdom: 1550 to 1070 B.C.

After the Middle Kingdom, Egypt was ruled by foreigners, known as the Hyksos kings who introduced the horse, the chariot and new bronze weapons. These weapons would prove very useful to the warrior-kings who dominated the New Kingdom. These kings were determined to make Egypt as strong as possible and waged war against their neighbours, creating the most powerful empire of the ancient world.

THE FEMALE PHARAOH

Not all of the New Kingdom kings were warlike. When Pharaoh Thutmose II died, his widow, Hatshepsut, acted first as regent for her nephew Thutmose III and for 15 years ruled as Pharaoh alone.



Hatshepsut's mortuary temple, built into the rock near the Valley of the Kings, is still an impressive sight.



Hatshepsut, alone, wasn't the only female Pharaoh, but all adopted the symbolic and official beard of the Pharaoh.



Ramesses II in his war chariot

AFTER THE NEW KINGDOM — ALEXANDER

When the New Kingdom ended, Ancient Egypt again fell under the sway of foreign rulers. The Persians, who ruled Egypt until 332 B.C., were so unpopular that when Alexander the Great defeated them, he was greeted as a liberator by the Ancient Egyptian people. He founded the city of Alexandria, which became renowned as a centre of culture and learning based around its famous museum and library.



A coin bearing the image of Alexander the Great



The Temple of Ptolemy at Esfya was built by Alexander's successor, Ptolemy I, who founded a new dynasty of Greek Pharaohs.

CLEOPATRA

Queen Cleopatra VII is one of the most famous figures in Ancient Egyptian history. She inherited the throne at a time when the Roman Empire was closing in on Egypt. Intelligent and ambitious, she had affairs with both Julius Caesar and Mark Antony. After Antony's defeat, she is said to have killed herself rather than be humiliated by Rome. Her death marks the end of Ancient Egypt.



An image of Queen Cleopatra

ACTIVITY: Design a coin commemorating Cleopatra's reign, with her head on one side and an event from her life on the other.