Egypt Under the Pharaohs
Ancient Egypt
Stele inscribed with a decree issued at Memphis in 196 BC by Ptolemy V; divine cult of a new ruler.
Egyptian Art

• Predynastic: 5500 B.C. – 3100 B.C. (Neolithic)
• Old Kingdom: 2575 B.C. – 2134 B.C.
• Middle Kingdom: 2040 B.C. – 1640 B.C.
• New Kingdom: 1550 B.C. – 1070 B.C.
• Ptolemaic: 332 B.C. – 395 A.D. (Classical Greece)

• Herodotus characterized the Egyptians as “religious to excess,” their concern with immortality amounted to near obsession and the overall preoccupation in this life was to insure safety and happiness in the next life. (An Account of Egypt, 5th c B.C.)
Egyptian gods

A quick reference to a few of the major ancient Egyptian gods

- **Amun** - ancient creation deity; one of 8 gods of chaos; combined with the supreme solar deity, Ra; Amun-RA was the hidden power that created the gods.
- **Anubis** – Embalming, funerary god
- **Horus** - Falcon. Sky god whose left eye was the moon and whose right eye was the sun (depicted as an eye); king of Egypt.
- **Osiris** - Earth and vegetation.
- **Ptah** - Patron of craftsmen
- **Re/Ra** – Sun
- **Seth** - Lord of Lower Egypt & evil enemy of Horus
- **Thoth** - Wisdom & learning.
Egyptian goddesses

- **Bastet** - a sun goddess (who came to be associated with the moon after contact with the Greek goddess Artemis.)
- **Hathor** – the sky, the sun, the queen, music, dance and the arts; can be seen as the mother-goddess of the whole world, similar to Isis
- **Isis** – birth, growth, development and vigor; loving wife and mother, and that was how Ancient Egyptians worshiped her - and loved her - the most; also a magician. Twin sister of Nephthys
- **Nephthys** – death, decay, diminution and immobility; twin sister of Isis.
- **Nut** - sky goddess and mother of the gods (connected with the underworld, resurrection and the tomb. She was seen as a friend to the dead, as a mother-like)
Predynastic Egypt

- Egyptians developed written language and institutionalized religion (possibly before the Sumerians, but this debatable!)
- Developed a settled, agricultural civilization along the Nile.
- Pottery was being made and tombs were constructed of mud and brick.
- Lower Egypt (north) was more opulent, populous and urban; Upper Egypt (south) was dry, rocky, culturally rustic.
Describe what you see....

Watercolor copy of a wall painting from tomb 100 at Hierakonpolis, Egypt, Predynastic, ca. 3500–3200 BCE.
Gardner/Kleiner suggests a possible Mesopotamian "influence" in the heraldic image as seen above.

Do you think this theory is valid or an oversimplification?

c.a. 3000-2600 B.C.
Old Kingdom

• It was during the Old Kingdom, that the traditions and standards of Egyptian art were established. Rules of construction and composition were established between Dynasty III and IV.

• Egyptian sculpture is characterized by (1) compactness (2) symmetry of form and (3) its block-like shape
Palette of Narmer

Palette of King Narmer (left, back; right, front), from Hierakonpolis, Egypt, Predynastic, ca. 3000–2920 BCE
In three registers:

**Top:** 2 cow heads symbolic of Hathor; Narmer’s name written in hieroglyphs

**Middle:** the king, wearing the white crown (of Upper Egypt), accompanied by an official (carrying his sandals) slays an enemy. Beside him we see the human armed falcon, Horus, the king’s protector, over a human-headed papyrus hieroglyph for Lower Egypt.

**Below:** two more slain enemies. Below are fallen enemies and above are further symbols for the king’s palace and the cow-faced goddess, Hathor.
In four registers:

**Top:** 2 cow heads symbolic of Hathor; Narmer’s name written in hieroglyphs

**Top Middle:** Narmer, in the red, cobra crown of Lower Egypt reviews beheaded enemies.

**Lower Middle:** A symmetrical pair of [lions] with their necks intertwined, symbolizing the unification.

**Bottom:** Bull topples a rebellious city.
Why is the palette important?

The simple answer:

- The *Palette of Narmer* is a major historical document and piece of Egyptian sculpture of the Early Dynastic period, ca. 3150 BC.

- It shows, *in representational and symbolic form*, the conquest of Lower Egypt by an Upper Egyptian ruler called Narmer (aka Menes).
  - Narmer, by unifying the two Egyptians, became the first pharaoh. He is the divine ruler, supreme man and solely responsible for triumph over the enemy.
  - On the palette, Narmer is shown with the Upper Egyptian god, Horus (imaged as a falcon), defeating a lower Egyptian warrior and lording it over the Lower Egyptian symbol, the papyrus plant.
Mastaba

The standard tomb was the *mastaba* (Arabic for “bench”), built over a subterranean tomb chamber, connected with the outside by a shaft. Originally built for an individual, it eventually was used for multiple family burials = funerary chapel

Section (*top*), plan (*center*), and restored view (*bottom*) of typical Egyptian mastaba tombs.
Step(ped) Pyramid

c. 2650 B.C. the Step Pyramid of Djoser was built.
Dual purpose: protect mummified king and his possessions & symbolize his absolute and godlike power.

Created by Imhotep, first known artist of recorded history
The pyramid was not an isolated mountain, but part of an elaborate complex. This one was surrounded by a 34’ stone (fortress like) wall, enclosing 37 acres of living mortuary

Plan (*top*) and restored view (*bottom*) of the mortuary precinct of Djoser, Saqqara, Egypt, Third Dynasty, ca. 2630–2611 BCE.
Old Kingdom Pyramids

- Egyptian tombs provide the principal, if not the exclusive, evidence for historical reconstruction of Egyptian civilization.
- On the west bank of the Nile are the three pyramids of Khafre, Khufu and Menkaure (4th Dynasty).
  - Pyramids did not evolve out of necessity. The 3rd dynasty king’s were largely influenced by the city of Heliopolis, close to the ancient Egyptian capital of Memphis.
  - Heliopolis was the seat of the cult god Re, the sun-god, whose fetish was a pyramidal stone, the ben-ben.
  - By the 4th dynasty, the king’s considered themselves the son of Re and his incarnation on earth.
  - Pharaohs believed the spirit and power of Re resided in the ben-ben, so it isn’t a far stretch to believe that their bodies and spirits would be similarly preserved within pyramidal tombs.
Great Pyramids, Gizeh, Egypt, Fourth Dynasty. 
From bottom: Pyramids of Menkaure, ca. 2490–2472 BCE; Khafre, ca. 2520–2494 BCE; and Khufu, ca. 2551–2528 BCE.

Egyptians buried their dead on the west (sunset) side of the Nile
Khafre (Chephren)
Khufu (Cheops)
Menkaure (Mycerinus)
Section of the Pyramid of Khufu, Gizeh, Egypt, Fourth Dynasty, ca. 2551–2528 BCE.
Great Sphinx (with Pyramid of Khafre in the background at left), Gizeh, Egypt, Fourth Dynasty, ca. 2520–2494 BCE. Sandstone, 65’ X 240’.
Mummification

• Mummification is an embalming technique
• Preservation of the body was required so the deceased person could live for eternity.
• Equally important were all earthly possessions so that everything that was enjoyed in this life could continue to be enjoyed in the next life.
  – Food, drink, utensils
  – *Ushabtis* (figurines)
Mummies
Grave Goods
Making sculptures

Sculptors at work, detail of the south wall of the main hall of the funerary chapel of Rekhmire, Thebes, Egypt, 18th Dynasty, ca. 1425 BCE.

Images such as this wall painting provides information on how sculptures, and by extension architecture, was made in Egypt.
In tombs, sculptures provided the important function of creating an image of the deceased that would house the *ka* (soul), should the mummy be destroyed.

Royal and noble class images were made of stone (more durable than clay and wood).

For this reason, an interest in portraiture developed early in Egypt.
Seated statue of Hemiunu, from his mastaba at Gizeh, Egypt, Fourth Dynasty, ca. 2550–2530 BCE. Painted limestone, 5’ 1 1/2" high. Römer- und Pelizaeus-Museum, Hildesheim.
Compare & Contrast

2525-2475 B.C

2550–2530 BCE.
Egyptian Tomb Reliefs and Murals

Goats treading seed and cattle fording a canal, reliefs in the mastaba of Ti, Saqqara, Egypt, Fifth Dynasty, ca. 2450 – 2350 BCE. Painted limestone.
In Egyptian tombs, the deceased were also represented in reliefs and mural paintings. Sometimes alone, sometimes in a narrative context. Most often scenes are of agriculture & hunting.

Geese, detail from a fresco in the mastaba tomb of Atet at Medum, ca. 2600-2550 B.C.

Ti watching a hippopotamus hunt, relief in the tomb of Ti, Saqqara, ca. 2500-2400 B.C.
Middle Kingdom

• Rock-cut tombs replace the mastaba. Pyramids were built but on a much smaller scale.

• Sarcophagi became larger and heavier, made of granite.
  – They were intended to stop robbers b/c of their size and weight.

• Portraits become realistic.
  – They are personal & tend to show anxiety, reflective of a trouble time in Egypt.
Fragmentary head of Senuret III, 12th Dynasty, ca. 1860 BCE. Red quartzite, 6 ½” high. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
ARCHITECTURE

Rock-cut tombs BH 3-5, Beni Hasan, Egypt, 12th Dynasty, ca. 1950 – 1900 BCE
Interior hall of the rock-cut tomb of Amenemhet (tomb BH 2), Beni Hasan, Egypt, 12th Dynasty, ca. 1950–1900 BCE.
The New Kingdom

• Considered the most brilliant period in Egypt’s history
  – The most prosperous time and marked its peak of power.
• Thebes is established as the new capital
  – Luxurious metropolis with palaces, tombs, temples
• Borders ranged from modern day Syria to Northern Sudan (Nubia, Kush Kingdom)
• Contained some of Egypt’s most famous pharaohs
  – Hatshepsut
  – Akhenaten
  – Tutankhamen
  – Ramesses II (“the Great”)
Mortuary temple of Hatshepsut (with the Middle Kingdom mortuary temple of Mentuhotep II at left), Deir el-Bahri, Egypt, 18th Dynasty, ca. 1473–1458 BCE.
Hatshepsut

• Reliefs from the temple depict her as the daughter of Amun-Ra. She is the first woman to receive such lavish royal eulogies and representation.

• There were as many as 200 free standing images depicting Hatshepsut in various activities. Most of these were removed or shattered by her stepson, Thutmose III (r 1458 - 1425 BCE), when he came to the throne in the following reign.
  – He claimed she usurped 20 years of his reign.
Hatshepsut with offering jars, from the upper court of her mortuary temple, Deir el-Bahri, Egypt, 18th Dynasty, ca. 1473–1458 BCE. Red granite, 8’ 6” high. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
Temple of Ramesses II, Abu Simbel, Egypt, 19th Dynasty, ca. 1290–1224 BCE. Sandstone, colossi 65’ high.
Temple of Ramesses II

- The temple is dedicated to the most important gods of the New Kingdom, Ptah (the creator god of Memphis), Amun-Ra (the great god of Thebes) and Ra-Harakhte (sun god of Heliopolis), as well as to the Pharaoh Ramses II himself.
- A statue of Ra-Harakhte with the falcon head is in a niche over the entrance.
  - The god is flanked by low relief depictions of Ramesses II who presents him with a tiny statuette of Maat--goddess of Truth and Justice.
- Smaller sculptures between the legs and at the base of the colossi represent members of the royal family: mainly his 4 children, Queen Tu'e, the King's mother and Queen Nefertari, his wife
Interior of the temple of Ramesses II, Abu Simbel, Egypt, 19th Dynasty, ca. 1290–1224 BCE. Sandstone, pillar statues 32’ high.
Restored view of the temple of Amen-Ra, Karnak, Egypt, begun 15th century BCE (Jean Claude Golvin).

ancient religious site.....
Hypostyle hall, temple of Amen-Ra, Karnak, Egypt, 19th Dynasty, ca. 1290–1224 BCE.

4 precincts: Amen-Ra, Mut, Montu, and the dismantled Temple of Amenhotep IV

50,000 sq ft, with 134 massive columns arranged in 16 rows
Sculpture and Painting of the New Kingdom

Senmut with Princess Nefrua, from Thebes, Egypt, 18th Dynasty, ca. 1470–1460 BCE. Granite, 3’ 1/2” high. Ägyptisches Museum, Berlin.
The imagery in the tomb is symbolic and thematically related to a joyful afterlife.

Fowling scene, from the tomb of Nebamun, Thebes, Egypt, 18th Dynasty, ca. 1400–1350 BCE. Fresco on dry plaster,. 2’ 8” high. British Museum, London.
Musicians and dancers, from the tomb of Nebamun, Thebes, Egypt, 18th Dynasty, ca. 1400–1350 BCE. Fresco on dry plaster, 1’ X 2’ 3”. British Museum, London.
Akhenaton and the Amarna Period

Akhenaton, from the temple of Aton, Karnak, Egypt, 18th Dynasty, ca. 1353–1335 BCE. Sandstone, 13’ high. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.
THUTMOSE, Nefertiti, from Amarna, Egypt, 18th Dynasty, ca. 1353–1335 BCE. Painted limestone, approx. 1’ 8” high. Ägyptisches Museum, Berlin.

Tiye, from Ghurab, Egypt, 18th Dynasty, ca. 1353–1335 BCE. Wood, with gold, silver, alabaster, and lapis lazuli, 3 3/4” high. Ägyptisches Museum, Berlin.
Akhenaton, Nefertiti, and three daughters, from Amarna, Egypt, 18th Dynasty, ca. 1353–1335 BCE. Limestone, 1’ 1/4” high. Ägyptisches Museum, Berlin.
King Tutankhamen (Post Amarna Period)

Innermost coffin of Tutankhamen, from Tut’s tomb at Thebes, Egypt, 18th Dynasty, ca. 1323 BCE. Gold with inlay of enamel and semiprecious stones, 6’ 1” long.

Death mask of Tutankhamen, from the innermost coffin in his tomb at Thebes, Egypt, 18th Dynasty, ca. 1323 BCE. Gold with inlay of semiprecious stones.
Egyptian Painting in Books of the Dead

- a papyrus scroll inscribed with a collection of texts from the Book of the Dead, known to the Egyptians as the "Book of Coming Forth by Day."
Last judgment of Hu-Nefer, from his tomb at Thebes, Egypt, 19th Dynasty, ca. 1290–1280 BCE. Painted papyrus scroll, 1’ 6” high. British Museum, London.

Hu-Nefer, a royal scribe and steward, led by Anubis, god of embalming.

Anubis adjusting the scales; the heart weighed against Maat.

Ammit waits for outcome (lion, hippo, croc – female demon).

Toth waits to record the verdict.

Having survived the test Hu-Nefer is led by Horus up to Osiris himself, to receive his reward of eternal life.
Kingdom of Kush

- The New Kingdom pharaohs colonized Nubia (Kushite Kingdom) and controlled the major trade route between Egypt and sub-Sahara Egypt.
- 727 BCE the Kushite king Piye invaded northward, seizing control of Thebes and eventually the Delta. His dynasty, the 25th dynasty of Egypt, continued until about 653 BCE.
Pyramids of Meroe in Sudan. In the front from left to right are the pyramids N25, N26 and N27.
Ptolemaic Egypt

- Founded in 305 BC by Ptolemy I Soter who declared himself Pharaoh of Egypt.
- Alexandria became the capital city and a center of Greek culture and trade.
- To gain recognition and acceptance by the native Egyptian population, they named themselves the successors to the Pharaohs.
  - Egyptian traditions and religion were continued under Greek rule.
  - Ptolemaic Pharaohs often portrayed themselves in the traditional pharaonic iconography, especially in public monuments.
- Hellenistic culture continued to thrive in Egypt, even after the Roman conquest in 30 BC
Cleopatra & Caesarion, Temple of Dendera

Dendera Temple Complex
Temple of Horus, Edfu, Egypt, ca. 240 BCE
Continuity in Ancient Egyptian Art

- Despite some alterations and short deviations (Amarna) from their artistic tradition, Egyptians maintain continuity in their art (statue of Mentuemhet, ca. 650 BCE) and architecture (Temple of Horus, Edfu, ca. 237 – 47 BCE)
The last rulers of Egypt

• 332 BCE *Alexander the Great* conquers Egypt (Ptolemaic)
• 30 BCE *Romans* conquer Egypt
• 616 – 629 AD *Persians* conquer Egypt
• 629 AD *Romans* re-conquer
• 639- 641 AD *Muslim* conquest (via Palestine)