

Egypt in the Pharaonic Era



The Pharaonic Era dates back to 3000 years B.C. till Alexander the Great conquered Egypt in 323 B.C. During the Pharaonic Era, Egypt witnessed many aspects of progress and renaissance in all fields.

Historians divide the Pharaonic Era into three successive divisions: Old Kingdom, Middle Kingdom and Modern Kingdom. The Pharaonic Era is thus divided into three dynasties as follows:

Ancient Age (Dynasties I & II)



In 3200 B.C. Menes managed to unify north and south of Egypt and he established the first ruling dynasty. To secure the unity of Egypt, Menes established the city of Memphis near Delta.



Old Kingdom (Dynasties from III to VI)

During the Old Kingdom, Egypt enjoyed stability, security and peace, a matter that achieved its economic, cultural and artistic progress in this time. The kings of the Old Kingdom ruled till 2800 B.C. after the throne of Egypt moved to Manf by Zoser, whose pyramid is the oldest known one at Saqqara. The Egyptian civilization flourished in this period, a matter represented in the building of the Giza Pyramids: Khufu (Cheops), Khafre (Chephren) and Menkaura (Mycerinus).

The First Middle Age (Dynasties from VII to X)

This age began in 2200 B.C. when Menthotpe II (Mentuhotep) managed to reunify the country.

The Middle Kingdom (Dynasties XI& XII)



After Menthotpe II, the Prince of Thebes, managed to reunify the country and founded a strong government, Egypt flourished economically. In 2000 B.C. Amenemhet I played a great role in the renaissance of the Middle Kingdom.

The kings and queens of Dynasty XII acquired fame all over the world in the fields of policy, war, culture civilization and religion such as Ahmos, hero of liberation, Amenhotep I who laid down fair standards for wages and incentives, Tuhutmos I, the warrior who expanded the Egyptian borders north and south, and spread out education everywhere, Tuhutmos III who possessed a unique military genius, Tuhutmos IV, the diplomat who was the first to record international agreements.

This is in addition to Akhenaton who was the first to call for the oneness of the Creator and Tut Ankh Amun, who gained fame in the modern time. The most famous queens of this time were Ahmos Nefertari, wife of Ahmos I, Tee, mother of Akhenaton, Nefertiti, wife of Akhenaton and Hatchepsut who ruled Egypt for 20 years.

The Second Middle Age (Dynasties XIII, XVII)

In 1725 B.C. the Hyksos attacked Egypt and occupied the Egyptian lands. Yet, the princes of Thebes, led by Ahmos I, managed to expel them out of Egypt.

The Modern Kingdom (Dynasties XVIII, XX)



After Ahmos expelled the Hyksos, he worked on establishing a well-equipped army. Ramsis II, one of the most famous kings of the Modern Kingdom, signed the first peace treaty in history with the Hittites.

The Late Age (Dynasties XXI to XXX)

From Dynasty XXI till Dynasty XVIII, the Assyrians and the Persians occupied Egypt, till the

rule of the Pharaohs ended during the reign of Dynasty XXX when Alexander the Great conquered Egypt.

Arts of the Pharaonic Civilization

Architecture

Ancient Egyptians made outstanding achievements in architecture, as can be clearly seen from the everlasting monuments they have left behind. The first pyramid ever built in Egypt was Zoser's, then Midum's pyramid. However, the Giza pyramids together with the Sphinx, built during the 4th Dynasty, are the most famous of the 97 pyramids built to be tombs for Pharaohs.

During the period of the Middle Kingdom, many funerary temples were built. The 12th Dynasty kings were also interested in el-Fayyoun area where they attended to irrigation works.

The most famous of those temples was the Labyrinth Temple or the "Maze Palace" as called by the Greeks. The temple was built in Hawwara by King Amenemhet III, who also built castles, fortresses and walls along Egypt's eastern borders.

The period of the Middle Kingdom was the heyday of architectural arts, where exquisite inscriptions and fine artworks were engraved on the walls of colossal temples, the most prominent ones were Karnak, Luxor and Abu Simbel.

The era of Thutmose I was a turning point in using pyramids as tombs. On the west bank of the Nile at Luxor, there were carved-into-mountains tombs with rich and luxurious funerary furniture. This can be clearly seen in the tomb of Tutankhamun.

In order to keep wall inscriptions intact, the artists of the Modern kingdom deliberately used deep slightly embossed engravings, thus, avoiding distortion or erosion.

The most recently discovered tomb of the Valley of Kings was that of the sons of King Ramsis II; a vast tomb containing 15 mummies. Pharaonic obelisks were cut out of granite and erected in two-somes at the entrance of temples. Some of the most beautiful examples of architectural art in the ancient Egyptian empire are the temples of Amun, Cheops in Karnak and Luxor, Ramsium and Hetshep-sut at ad-Deir al-Bahari as well as the rock-embedded temples such as the major and minor temples of Abu Simbel.

New trends in the architectural, plastic and applied arts emerged as can be clearly seen in the sculptured colossal and minor statues and ornamented temple columns and mural inscriptions. This elevated style is evident in thousands of small statues made from alabaster, wood or ivory and pieces of antiquities made of glass and earthenware and jewelry inlaid with precious stones.

Literature

Ancient Egyptian monuments still bear witness to their excellent talent in writing and literature. Humanity is indebted to ancient Egyptians for inventing writing, later called by the Greeks the "hieroglyphic alphabet"; composed of 24 letters. Writings were made in black or red ink on papyrus. Egyptians excelled in religious writing which tackled their religious creeds and theories of the after life, secrets of the universe, various myths of gods, prayers and songs. The oldest examples of which were "The Pyramids Texts" and "The Book of the Dead".

Ancient Egyptian writers were excellent story writers. They used words as a tool to convey wisdom and rules of good conduct. Ancient Egyptians were bent on narrating their heritage of wise sayings and proverbs, chanting them in their feasts and ceremonies. They pursued the tradition of documenting current events of their times. This rich cultural climate was instrumental in generating several Egyptian men of letters and philosophers who left masterpieces indicative of a high level of culture and thought in Egypt.

Music

Music and songs were a favorite object for all Egyptians. Music was used for educating young people as well as in public and private ceremonies, particularly in the army. It was equally used in prayers and the burial of the dead.

Egyptians from the Old Kingdom knew wind and stringed instruments such as the “harp” known at that time as “Tipoti”. They also invented many new types of percussion instruments which were further improved across their history.

Ornamentation

Ornaments, characterized by high artistic precision and beautiful form, were also known to ancient Egyptians. Decorative elements were derived from natural surroundings including papyrus, palm trees, lotus flowers and precious stones. Amulets, believed to protect them against evil spirits, were used. Women, in particular, paid special attention to their own make-up and toilet. They were accustomed to use Kohl (as eye-liner), bracelets, necklaces, rings and henna. Costumes in Pharaonic Egypt varied from one class to another. Clothes were made of soft linen or silk fabrics imported from ancient Syria (Phoenicia). Clothes differed according to the occasion.