

Lesson 3 The Pyramid Builders

MAIN IDEAS

Government Egypt united under a central government that ruled for centuries.

Culture Pharaoh Khufu built a huge monument to proclaim his glory.

Government Egypt entered a period of change as centralized rule weakened.

The Old Kingdom

ESSENTIAL QUESTION What kind of government ruled Egypt after it was united?

The First Dynasty

- Legend says a king, Narmer, united Upper and Lower Egypt
 - some historians believe several rulers united Egypt
- Ruler of united Egypt wore the double crown
- First **dynasty**—line of rulers from same family—about 2925 B.C.
- When a king died, he was usually replaced by one of his children
 - **succession**—order in which royal family members inherit a throne
- Historians divided dynasties into Old, Middle, and New kingdoms
 - Old Kingdom began around 2575 B.C. as empire gained strength

Pharaohs Rule

- King of Egypt became known as **pharaoh**, which means “great house”
 - the pharaoh ruled from capital city of Memphis
- Egyptians believed pharaoh was a god, blamed him for hard times
 - in such times, a rival might replace pharaoh, start new dynasty
- Since pharaoh seen as god, government and religion not separate
 - priests had much power, were often high officials in government

REVIEW QUESTION

How were religion and government linked in ancient Egypt?

Khufu's Great Pyramid

ESSENTIAL QUESTION How did Pharaoh Khufu proclaim his glory?

Early Pyramids

- First rulers were buried in underground tombs, topped with bricks
- Later replaced bricks with small pyramid
 - **pyramid**—triangle-shaped structure, four sides meet at a point
- King Djoser built larger pyramid over his tomb around 2630 B.C.
 - called **step pyramid**—sides rise in series of big steps
 - oldest-known large stone structure in world

The Great Pyramid

- 80 years later, pharaoh **Khufu** wanted to show world his greatness
 - ordered construction of largest pyramid ever, with 760-foot sides
 - 2.3 million stone blocks cut, pulled up ramps, dragged into place
- Farmers worked during Nile's flood season, others worked all year
- Took an estimated 20,000 people almost 20 years to build
 - city of Giza was built for workers

Grave Robbers

- Egyptians later stopped building pyramids, in part due to robbery
 - grave robbers often stole the tombs' treasures, even the mummies
- Egyptians believed robbery kept the buried from a happy afterlife
- Pharaohs built secret tombs in the Valley of the Kings
 - built during New Kingdom to protect treasures, bodies
 - burial chambers were hidden in mountains near Nile

Inside the Tombs

- Several passageways led to different rooms to confuse robbers
 - queens, other relatives sometimes buried in other rooms
- Tomb was palace of pharaoh's afterlife—filled with food, furniture
- Wall paintings, sculptures glorified the dead person, the gods
 - paintings showed head, arms, legs from side, and body from front
 - showed pharaohs enjoying themselves, fighting battles

REVIEW QUESTION

Why did Khufu decide to build such a large pyramid?

Middle Kingdom

ESSENTIAL QUESTION What happened to Egypt when centralized rule weakened?

Invasions

- By 2130 B.C., kings began to lose power to local province rulers
 - weak central government held Egypt together for 500 more years
 - this period known as the Middle Kingdom
- Nomadic Hyksos invaded from northeast with chariots, better weapons
 - after 100 years, Egyptians drove out Hyksos, began New Kingdom

REVIEW QUESTION

How was the Middle Kingdom different from the Old Kingdom?

Lesson Summary

- For thousands of years, Egypt remained a unified country ruled by a series of dynasties.
- The Egyptians built pyramids to honor pharaohs. Tombs inside the pyramids held treasures to be used in the afterlife.
- The Middle Kingdom was a time when the central government lost power to the provinces.

Why It Matters Now . . .

Ancient Egypt still fascinates people. Books and movies portray the mystery of mummies and tombs. People wear jewelry and use household objects modeled on Egyptian artifacts.