



Hatshepsut

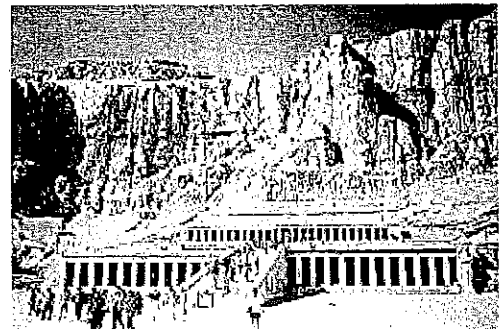
From the earliest time it had been the tradition that only a man could rule Egypt. But relationships in the Egyptian royal family could become complicated, and this tradition was shattered when a very successful female ruler came to power.

Around 1495 B.C. King Thutmose I died. He left behind a daughter, Hatshepsut, and a son named after his father. To strengthen the boy's claim to the throne Thutmose II married his half-sister, Hatshepsut. But Thutmose II was weak, and completely over-shadowed by the strong-willed Hatshepsut. He reigned only a few years and at his death he left behind a young son by another woman. Though this son inherited the royal title of Thutmose III, the real ruler was Hatshepsut. She had herself formally proclaimed "king." She was the first known female to take the title Pharaoh. In order for people to accept her as pharaoh, Hatshepsut began to dress like a pharaoh. She wore the pharaoh's headdress with a cobra. She even wore a fake beard and a short kilt like the men wore. From that time on, the royal sculptors often showed her with a beard.

Although scribes describe her as a "raging crocodile," a compliment meaning that she was fierce and warlike, her reign was a relatively secure one. She sent trading expeditions all along the coast of Africa, extending Egypt's commercial contacts farther than ever before. Through trade she made Egypt a rich nation. She also built an immense temple at Thebes that is still considered one of the great glories of Egyptian architecture. She was one of the most prolific builders in Ancient Egypt, commissioning hundreds of construction projects throughout Egypt. Her rule was a time of peace and prosperity. One historian called her "The first great woman in history."

After twenty-two years of ruling Egypt this remarkable woman disappeared from records. It is unknown whether she died of natural causes, or was killed, or otherwise pushed aside. Waiting in the background was Thutmose III, no longer a boy, but a man of nearly thirty. She probably died from a blood infection, but it is also known that Thutmose III was not fond of her. He may have had her assassinated. Thutmose III went on to become a great Pharaoh in his own right. An attempt was made by Thutmose III to erase the name of Queen Hatshepsut from the history of Egypt, to confirm his right to the throne and because of the deep belief that a woman could never be a successful pharaoh. He tried to erase her from history by having her face chiseled off carvings on walls and tearing down monuments built by her.

In June 2007, the mummy of Queen Hatshepsut was finally positively identified when a tooth, kept at a temple in a box bearing the name of the female pharaoh, was confirmed as belonging to Queen Hatshepsut. The tooth was found to be the exact match for a gap in the upper jaw of a previously unidentified mummy. The mummy of Queen Hatshepsut is now displayed in the Cairo Museum.



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Color, Symbol, Image Routine ~ Egyptian Style

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Tutankhamen

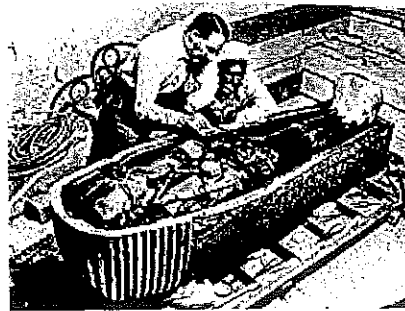
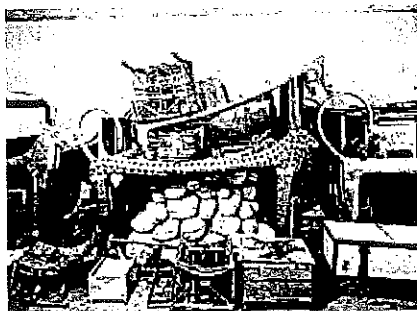
Tutankhamen was the twelfth king of the 18th Egyptian dynasty and he reigned from 1361-1352 B.C.E. Although his reign was relatively unimportant, Tutankhamen became the most famous of the pharaohs when his treasure-filled tomb was discovered in the early twentieth century.

Little is known of Tutankhamen's childhood. We know that he was born a prince in Egypt's royal court around the year 1341 B.C.E. His father was the Pharaoh Akhenaten. Akhenaten was a religious radical. He changed the entire religion of Ancient Egypt to worship only the sun god Aten, instead of the usual worship of many gods at that time. At the young age of seven years old, Tutankhamen's father died. A few years later Tutankhamen married his sister (which was common for Pharaoh's in Ancient Egypt) and became Pharaoh. Since he was so young he had help ruling the country. The real rulers were a powerful general named Horemheb and Tutankhamen's vizier named Ay. Many people of Egypt had been unhappy with the religious reforms of his father. Tutankhamen and his advisors tried to fix all the changes that his father had made. Under Tutankhamen Egypt returned to their old gods and the old temples.

Despite the existence of paintings of Tutankhamen slaying his foes, it is doubtful that he engaged in any serious military operations. He was a trained archer and many trophies from his hunts were found in his tomb. Tutankhamen died around the age of nineteen. Archeologists aren't sure what killed him. Some people think that he was assassinated, but the likely cause of his death was a wound to his leg which probably happened from an accident. Some Egyptologists believe he was murdered by his successor Ay. An x-ray done in 1968 shows a piece of bone within Tut's skull which could have been caused by a fall, a hit on the head, or something done during the mummification process.

Tutankhamen is most famous today for his tomb in the Valley of the Kings. It is likely that his tomb was built for someone else and was used to bury the young Pharaoh when he died unexpectedly. This may have helped to keep his tomb hidden from thieves for all those thousands of years. As a result, when the tomb was finally discovered by archeologist Howard Carter in 1922, it was filled with treasure and artifacts unlike found in any other Pharaoh's tomb. King Tut's tomb is one of the greatest and most important discoveries in archeology.

The tomb room contained more than five thousand objects, many of which were covered with gold and beautifully carved. The most famous of these objects is probably the lifelike gold death mask that covered the face of Tutankhamen's mummy. Howard Carter also uncovered military items, clothing, jewelry, and many statues of Tutankhamen and Egyptian gods. The vast and untouched contents of his tomb offered historians great insight into the ancient Egyptian culture. In fact, there were so many items in the tomb that many are still being examined today and have yet to be displayed in museums . . . nearly eighty years after their discovery.



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Rameses II

“One gets so tired of Rameses,” a traveler in Egypt complained. “His face, his figure, and/or his name are plastered over half the wall surfaces still standing in Egypt; at least it seems that way.”

Also known as Rameses the Great, Rameses II was the most significant Egyptian pharaoh of the 19th Dynasty. He is believed to have reigned for 66 years. The importance of Rameses reign cannot be understated. He ruled as pharaoh longer than the seven other 19th Dynasty pharaohs combined. His lengthy reign made him an important, respected and feared person as he saw many foreign monarchs come and go while serving as Pharaoh.

From a young age, Rameses was trained as a ruler and a fighter. He was made an army captain at age 10 and he began military campaigns even before he became pharaoh. Modern scientific examination has shown that the pharaoh was physically unusual as well. He was a redhead, an uncommon trait among Egyptians, and though his hair grayed in old age, the hair on his mummy remains red, dyed either before death or by the priests who prepared him for the afterlife.

Rameses the Great presided over an expanding Egypt that prospered. During his reign, he greatly increased the size of his kingdom. Much of his reign was occupied with taking back territories that Egypt had lost to its neighbors, the mighty Hittite Empire, located in the Middle East. Rameses II's army was 100,000 men strong, enormous for that period in time. One battle, the Battle of Kadesh, was the largest chariot battle in history; the battle involved some 5,000 chariots and nearly twice as many foot soldiers. Rameses eventually established the earliest known international peace treaty with the Hittites. This helped to solidify Egypt's borders and stabilize his country.

Rameses II is believed to be the Egyptian pharaoh that ruled during the time of the Biblical Exodus story. This is the story of Moses and the Israelites that were forced to work for the Pharaoh. In the story, Moses asks Pharaoh to let the people go, but Rameses refuses until God helps them by imposing the Ten Plagues upon ancient Egypt. The Israelites manage to escape the Egyptian army at the crossing of the Red Sea.

Like many pharaohs, Rameses was extremely arrogant and boastful. He claimed to be the son of both Seti I and the god Amun. He is perhaps best known for his architectural achievements. His interest in architecture resulted in the completion of more monuments than any other ancient Egyptian pharaoh and a significant number of his structures still dominate the landscape of Egypt today. Thanks in part to his long reign, no pharaoh built more temples or more obelisks or had so many statues sculpted of him, both before and after his death. Most notable is the Rock Temple of Rameses at Abu Simbel. This famous temple features four colossal seated statues of Rameses, each of which were cut 69 feet high! Also, the temples at Karnak and Luxor stand as 3,000-year-old symbols of the great Pharaoh's power.



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Cleopatra

Cleopatra was the last Pharaoh of ancient Egypt. Her rule marked the beginning of the Roman Era in the eastern Mediterranean. She was a clever, ambitious and determined woman who is also remembered today for her great beauty.

After the death of the Egyptian king Ptolemy XII, his daughter, Cleopatra, became queen of Egypt. The Ptolemy family was not Egyptian. They originally came from a region of Greece. They spoke and wrote the Greek language. Beginning at age 17, Cleopatra ruled ancient Egypt for 22 years. Her reign was during a period of Egyptian history when Egypt was a part of the Roman Empire. In fact, Cleopatra secured the throne of Egypt with the help of Julius Caesar. The only person who stood in the way of Cleopatra taking the throne was Ptolemy XIII, who was drowned in the Nile.

Even though she was born in Greece, Cleopatra was worshipped by the ancient Egyptians. For 300 years, Egypt had been ruled by the Greeks. Cleopatra was the first pharaoh in 300 years to have learned the Egyptian language and adopt Egyptian beliefs and religion. She and her family wore Egyptian clothes, worshipped Egyptian gods, and demanded that the people of Egypt treat them as gods. Greek pharaohs were not new, but being a Greek pharaoh that embraced Egypt was.

Cleopatra was a woman of great beauty who used that beauty to help secure her authority and make political alliances, which can be seen by her personal associations with several of the world's most powerful men at the time. She was the kind of woman who used what she had to get what she wanted.

Egypt at this time was rich, but not powerful. They didn't have an army or a navy. It certainly could not stand for long against the expanding military power of the Roman Empire. Cleopatra knew that if Egypt was to survive as an independent kingdom it would need powerful friends in Rome. She captivated the Roman conqueror Julius Caesar when he visited Egypt, and she went with him to Rome. She even bore him a son.

But Caesar was assassinated and Rome was torn by civil war. Cleopatra then allied herself with Caesar's friend Mark Antony, who wanted supreme power in Rome. Their relationship was partly practical and political . . . she needed Roman protection; he needed Egyptian wealth. But the Egyptian queen and the Roman warrior developed a deep love for each other. They had several children.

The Roman civil war dragged on for years. In the end Antony and Cleopatra lost. It was a Roman custom for losing generals to commit suicide by stabbing themselves. That is what Antony did. Cleopatra knew that her fate would be grim if she was captured by her Roman enemies, so she too committed suicide. According to legend and tradition, she allowed herself to be bitten by a poisonous snake, a symbol of Egypt.



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Menes

Historians consider Menes to be Egypt's first pharaoh or king. The title pharaoh means "great house." Menes also founded Egypt's first dynasty, or series of rulers from the same family.

According to tradition, around 3100 B.C.E. Menes rose to power in Upper Egypt. Some historians think Menes is a myth and that his accomplishments were really those of other ancient kings named Aha, Scorpion, or Narmer. Menes wanted to unify the kingdoms of Upper and Lower Egypt. He had his armies invade Lower Egypt and take control of it. Menes then married a princess from Lower Egypt to strengthen his control over the newly unified country.

Menes wore both the white crown of Upper Egypt and the red crown of Lower Egypt to symbolize his leadership over the two kingdoms. Later, he combined the two crowns into a double crown, as you can see in the picture below.

Menes built a new capital city at the southern tip of the Nile Delta. The city was later named Memphis. It was near where Lower Egypt met Upper Egypt, close to what is now Cairo, Egypt. For centuries, Memphis was the political and cultural center of Egypt. Many government offices were located there, and the city bustled with artistic activity.

Menes also established the religion of ancient Egypt by combining the worship of gods such as Horus and Set with the other old gods. Temples were built during his reign to honor these gods. The wealth of Egypt prospered during this period and trading was promoted with the Syrians, Palestinians, Libyans and Mesopotamians.

The construction of Memphis as his capital, his tomb and other relics all show him to have been a great builder. Even before his time, the science of engineering must have been far advanced, because in order to secure the place that pleased him for his capital, he first erected a monster dam and changed the entire course of the lower Nile River.

According to priestly legend, Menes reigned for sixty-two years, and then fell in combat with a hippopotamus. Should we take this story seriously? One would like to think that, in the extreme age this fine old king had reached, he had more sense than to risk his life in such youthful sports. The tomb of Menes lies in his older home of upper Egypt. This tomb is not at all like the stone pyramids of the later kings. Wall after wall of bricks was built around and above his body, and then a great wood fire was set burning over the whole structure, perhaps to harden it. Encased within this unyielding shell the mortal remains of the first Pharaoh lay untouched by life or death for over of six thousand years.



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Khufu

Khufu was the founder of the fourth dynasty in Egypt. He is best known for his tomb, the Great Pyramid at Giza.

Khufu, called Cheops by the Greeks, was the son of King Snefru and Queen Hetepheres. Little is known about Khufu's life. The contents of his tomb, which would have told more about his history, were stolen during ancient times. Instead, only a few clues remain about his life. The one major clue that tells us how important Khufu must have been is the Great Pyramid of Giza near Cairo, Egypt.

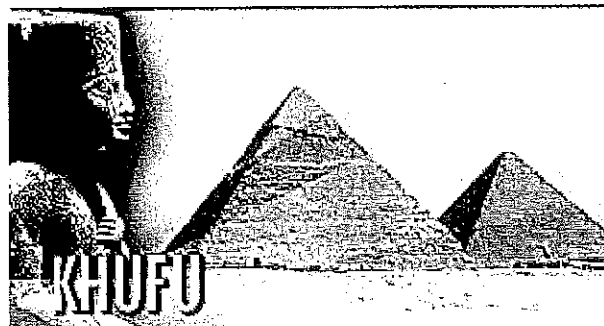
Khufu's father Snefru is credited with building at least three pyramids in Egypt. Khufu is credited with the construction of the Great Pyramid at Giza sometime around 2600 B.C.E. The Great Pyramid is one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. It is the only Wonder still standing today.

The pyramid of Khufu is the oldest and largest of the three pyramids at Giza. The pyramid covers about 13 acres at its base and was originally about 480 feet tall. It was made with more than two million solid limestone blocks, each weighing about 5,000 pounds. The stone was excavated in eastern Egypt, and then floated down the Nile River. The pyramid of Khufu originally had a surface casing of white, pearly limestone, but very little of this covering exists today.

Khufu earned a reputation as a cruel and ruthless pharaoh. He reigned from about 2589 to 2566 B.C.E., and was the founder of the fourth dynasty in Egypt. Khufu came to the throne, probably during his twenties, and at once began work on his pyramid. The entire project took about 23 years to complete. The sheer scale of this monument stands as a testament to his skills in commanding the material and human resources of his country. It is now believed the pyramids were built using paid laborers rather than slaves.

The idea that Khufu used slaves to build the pyramid comes from the Greek historian Herodotus. He also describes Khufu as a cruel and wicked leader. But another historian describes Khufu as a traditional monarch: good-natured, amiable to his inferiors and interested in the nature of human existence and magic.

After his death, his son Djedefre became the next pharaoh. The tombs of Khufu's family members are located near his pyramid in Egypt. His only surviving statue is, ironically, the smallest piece of Egyptian royal sculpture ever discovered: the 3 inch high ivory statue you see pictured above.



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Nefertiti

Nefertiti is believed by many to have been one of the most beautiful women of ancient Egypt. Her influence over her husband Akhenaton is believed to have played a major role in the changes brought about during his reign.

Nefertiti became the wife of Pharaoh Akhenaton, who ruled during Egypt's eighteenth dynasty. She was fifteen years old when they married. Nefertiti's name means "the beautiful woman has come." While little known of the famous queen, archeologists studying Egyptian ruins have found several references to Nefertiti. In fact, her image often appears alongside the images of the pharaohs.

Nefertiti practiced monotheism, the belief in one god. She believed in the god Aton, an Egyptian sun god. During this time, most Egyptians worshipped several gods. Some scholars believed that Nefertiti influenced her husband, Akhenaton, in his devotion to Aton. Some say she was the power behind the throne.

Akhenaton declared that Egypt should stop worshipping all their different gods and pray only to Aton. Several large temples were built for this new religion. Religious ceremonies were conducted in the temples. Nefertiti often lead these rituals. This was uncommon for a woman during that era. Before Nefertiti, even the Egyptian queens had not been allowed to take part in these ceremonies.

Archeologists have found many clues about Nefertiti's life among the ruins of ancient Egypt. Her name was changed many times, but each time her name contained some reference to her beauty.

Nefertiti and Akhenaton had six daughters. A relief carving has been found that shows the royal couple with their children. Unlike previous rulers, Akhenaton and Nefertiti allowed artists to depict them realistically, showing them as ordinary people.

Nefertiti is not mentioned in historical records following 1360 B.C.E. Some scholars believe that Nefertiti was banished from Egypt when she and Akhenaton had an argument over religion. Maybe there was a conflict in the royal family with Nefertiti wanting to continue worshipping Aten while Akhenaten and his son-in-law Tutankhamen supported a return to the worship of Amen-Ra and other gods. Others think she may have just died. It is believed that one of Nefertiti's daughters replaced her as queen.

While most of Nefertiti's life remains a mystery, her beauty is legendary, and Egyptians fondly remember her. While most of the monuments and references to Akhenaton were destroyed after his reign, several statues and likenesses of Nefertiti have survived. To this day, some still refer to Nefertiti as "the most beautiful woman in the world".



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