



Historically Speaking

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Pharaohs

The pharaohs were kings of ancient Egypt. Though the term pharaoh referring to the king was not used in ancient Egypt until the New Kingdom period (c. 1539–c. 1077 BCE), it is now used for all kings of ancient Egypt on the basis of its use in the Hebrew Bible. Dates for pharaohs beginning in the mid-7th century are firmly established, as they fit into the well-known chronology of the greater ancient Middle East in the 1st millennium BCE. Scholars disagree on the exact dates of kings prior to this time. There were some female pharaohs.

The first pharaoh generally recognized as such was Menes (aka Narmer- ca. 2900 BCE). This is essentially prehistoric times, so the information is derived from archaeological finds.

Archaeological evidence suggests that there were a number of kings who ruled parts of Egypt prior to the unification of the country under the 1st dynasty; these kings are sometimes collectively referred to as Dynasty 0. During this period, also known as the Predynastic period, kings ruled smaller territories from various capital cities. The dates of the kings' reigns are unknown, although their names are preserved in fragments of early writing. The kings of Dynasty 0 are dated to the late centuries of the 4th millennium or to the 30th century, since their names are preserved in the early system of hieroglyphic writing that developed at this time. Scholars have been able to read a few of the kings' Egyptian names from this early period, including Ny-Hor, Hat-Hor, Iry-Hor, and Ny-Neit.

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Pharaoh wearing the pschent, or double-crown, symbolizing control of both Upper and Lower Egypt.

What's happening?

I continue to work on AMON, my historical novel based in ancient Egypt. I have not yet decided, for sure, the dates for this book's events, but probably during the reign of the Nubian pharaoh, Piye (ca. 753 - 723 BCE).

Meanwhile, I have begun working on a new non-fiction project tentatively titled ECSTASY TROUGH AGONY: The Writer's Odyssey. It will be an attempt to discuss the emotional impact of writing on authors and poets.

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Several others are known by the signs used in their names, such as “Crocodile,” “Bird with vertical sign,” and “Scorpion.” The order in which these kings reigned is uncertain.

(most of the above was adapted from Britannica)

As ancient Egyptian rulers, pharaohs were both the heads of state and the religious leaders of their people. The word “pharaoh” means “Great House,” a reference to the palace where the pharaoh resides. While early Egyptian rulers were called “kings,” over time, the name “pharaoh” stuck.

As the religious leader of the Egyptians, the pharaoh was considered the divine intermediary between the gods and Egyptians. Maintaining religious harmony and participating in ceremonies were part of the pharaoh’s role as head of the religion. As a statesman, the pharaoh made laws, waged war, collected taxes, and oversaw all the land in Egypt (which was owned by the pharaoh).

Many scholars believe the first pharaoh was Narmer, also called Menes. Though there is some debate among experts, many believe he was the first ruler to unite upper and lower Egypt (this is why pharaohs hold the title of “lord of two lands”). Pharaohs were typically male, although there were some noteworthy female leaders, like Hatshepsut and Cleopatra. Hatshepsut, in particular, was a successful ruler, but many inscriptions and monuments about her were destroyed after her death—perhaps to stop future women from becoming pharaohs.

After their deaths, many pharaohs were entombed and surrounded by riches they were meant to use in the afterlife. Explorers and archaeologists have discovered these tombs and learned a great deal about ancient Egyptian society from them. One very famous example was in 1922 when archaeologist Howard Carter discovered the tomb of King Tutankhamen, a pharaoh who died when he was only nineteen.

(education.nationalgeographic.org)

10 Famous Ancient Egyptian Pharaohs

1. Djoser (reign 2686 BC – 2649 BC)
2. Khufu (reign 2589 – 2566 BC)
3. Hatshepsut (reign 1478–1458 BC)
4. Thutmose III (reign 1458–1425 BC)
5. Amenhotep III (reign 1388–1351 BC)
6. Akhenaten (reign 1351–1334 BC)
7. Tutankhamun (reign 1332–1323 BC)
8. Ramses II (reign 1279–1213 BC)
9. Xerxes I (reign 486 – 465 BC)
10. Cleopatra VII (reign 51 – 30 BC)

The last active ruler of the Ptolemaic Kingdom of Egypt, Cleopatra presided over the dying days of the Egyptian empire, yet her fame has lived on through folklore, Shakespeare and Hollywood. It’s hard to disentangle the real Cleopatra from the legend but scholars suggest that her portrayal as a stunningly beautiful seductress undersells her brilliance as a leader.

Cleopatra was an astute, politically savvy ruler who succeeded in bringing peace and relative prosperity to an ailing empire. The story of her love affairs with Julius Caesar and Marc Anthony is well documented but, without space to explore the complexities of a familiar tale, we might at least say that it’s tragic conclusion – Cleopatra’s suicide on 12 August 30 BC brought an end to the Egyptian empire.

(from historyhit.com)

Cleopatra was well-educated, and received an education that was typical for Ptolemaic royalty. She spoke many languages, including Egyptian, Greek, Ethiopian, and Latin. She was the only member of her family to learn Egyptian. Cleopatra studied a variety of subjects, including math, astronomy, philosophy, oratory, economics, law, and military strategy. She was also exposed to literary criticism, scientific research, and debates about history and politics.

The next Historically Speaking will address the Spartans