

## A brief history of Egypt.

**E**gypt's first known inhabitants were hunter-gatherers who arrived from northern Africa in search of game. They were joined by Asian nomads who had crossed the Sinai Peninsula. Over time, as they settled in the fertile Nile Valley, their way of life evolved in response to the seasonal ebb and flow of the river.

Agriculture in Egypt can be traced back to about 5000 B.C. As farming took hold and early Egyptians relied less on hunting and gathering and more on a constant food supply, they had time to devote to leisure pursuits, trading, and politics.

Primitive society gave way to civilization. And civilization blossomed in two geographic areas: Upper Egypt (Aswan to an area just south of what is now Cairo) and Lower Egypt (the Nile delta to the Mediterranean).

Menes was the first pharaoh to unite Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt. It happened in 3050 B.C., a year that also marks the birth of a dynastic society that lasted until the Arabs conquered Egypt in A.D. 640.

One of Egypt's great pharaohs was Akhnaton, who reigned from 1379 to 1362 B.C. Originally called Amenophis IV, he changed his name in honor of Aten, the sun god. Akhnaton heralded the concept of monotheism, a milestone in the history of religion.

Ramses II is another pharaoh who deserves mentioning.

He ruled from 1279 to 1212 B.C. and is known for his prodigious buildings, rising temples, statues, and other monuments throughout Egypt. Among his major

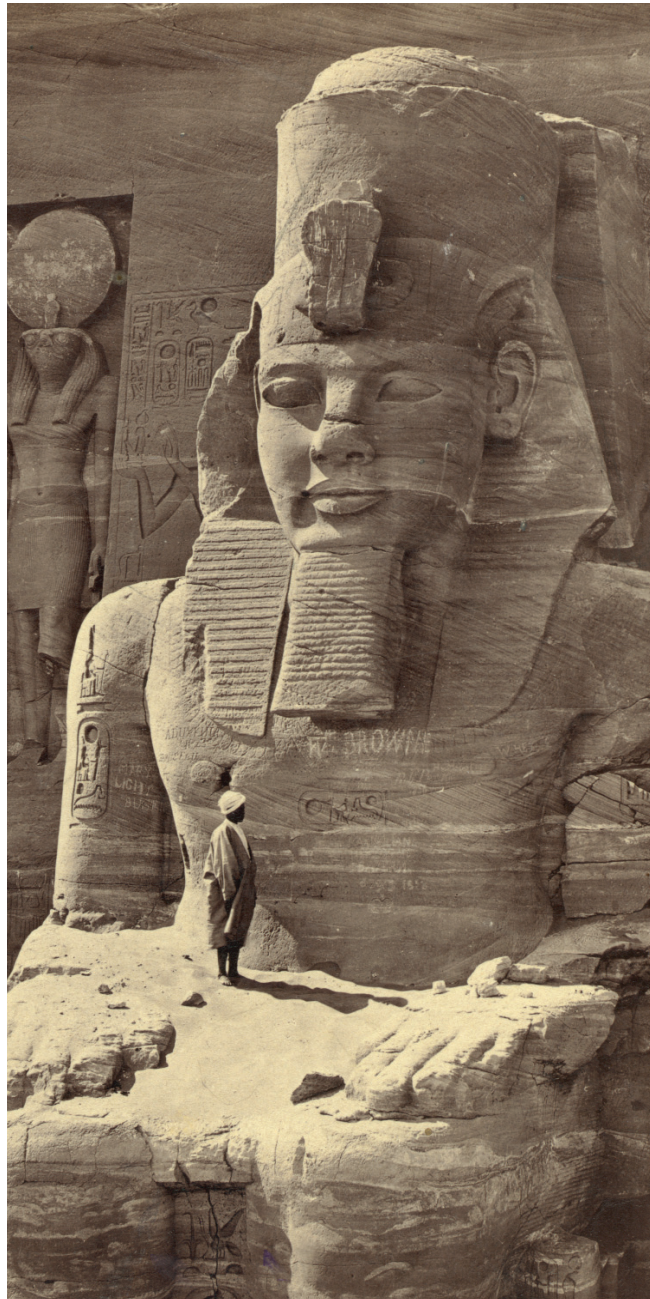
achievements was the signing of the world's first Peace Treaty, concluded between the Egyptians and the Hittites.

Alexander the Great arrived in the late autumn of 332 B.C. He founded Alexandria the following year as a gateway to his motherland, Greece. Alexandria proved to be a major center for trading, and its library became an important cultural center.

The Ptolemies ruled Egypt until 30 B.C. and were succeeded by the Romans until A.D. 642, when the Arabs—and Islam—arrived. It was during the Roman period that Christianity came to Egypt, and it was in Alexandria that the great Catechetical School was founded. It would produce the early fathers of the Christian church.

The Arabs were followed by the Mamlukes, magnificent warriors and who ruled Egypt from 1250 to 1517. Their reign ended with the Ottoman conquest of Egypt under Sultan Selim. Ottoman Turks controlled Egypt until 1798

with the arrival of Napoleon. Accompanying him were a team of scientists who made an encyclopedic survey of Egypt. The expedition contributed significantly to the study



*Pharaoh Ramses II keeps watch at Abu Simbel, 1857.*





*As they have for generations, traditional feluccas ply the Nile.*

of ancient Egyptian history through the discovery of the Rosetta Stone and the consequent deciphering of hieroglyphics.

After the departure of the French, Mohamad Ali, an officer in the Ottoman army, rose to power with the support of the Egyptian people. His rule extending from 1805 to 1849 was an eventful period in Egypt's modern history. He is regarded as the father of modern Egypt and the leader who set the country on the march towards modernization.

In 1863, Khedive Ismail, a member of Mohamad Ali's dynasty, rose to power. If Mohamad Ali had initiated modernization, it was Ismail who completed it. He strove to bring Egypt up to the same level of culture, civilization, and development enjoyed by most European nations. It was during his reign, in 1869, that the Suez Canal was begun.

On 12 August 1882, British troops landed at Alexandria marking the beginning of British occupation which lasted for 74 years. The beginning of the 20th century witnessed the awakening of the national conscience aiming at ending the British occupation.

After the 1948 Palestine War, political, economic and social frustration in Egypt led to the formation of the Free Officers Movement, created by a group of young officers who felt that they had been betrayed by their own

government. In July 1952, the Free Officer Movement led by Gamal Abd El-Nasser seized power in a bloodless revolution.

A year later, the monarchy ended and Egypt was declared a Republic. Mohamad Naguib was named its first president. Gamal Abdel Nasser came into power in 1954 and established a socialist republic. He remained in control for 18 years until his death in 1970. His successor, Anwar al-Sadat, Nasser's vice president, was assassinated in 1981 for his efforts at solving the conflicts of the Middle East. It was Sadat who signed the peace treaty with Israel in 1979. Hosni Mubarak has been in power ever since.



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