

Famous Pharaohs of Ancient Egypt

The kings of Ancient Egypt are better known as the pharaohs of Egypt. Modern Egypt no longer has pharaohs as leaders. However, pharaohs ruled as kings and, like kings, pharaohs were succeeded after death by members of their royal family, usually the oldest son. At times a military or other leader was able to take over the throne and his family became the new royal family. Historians call the takeover by a new ruler whose family then rules for a long time as the start of a new dynasty.



The Old Kingdom of Ancient Egypt began around 2650 BCE during the third Egyptian dynasty. Djoser was the second king in the third dynasty. A talented architect and scholar named Imhotep built the first Egyptian pyramid, a step pyramid, for Djoser. Imhotep was so admired by the Egyptian people that he was later worshipped as a god. The first king of the fourth dynasty, Seneferu, built the first true pyramid and historians believe he is buried in the ancient Red Pyramid. Seneferu's son, Khufu, built the Great Pyramid at Giza. Khufu is sometimes called by the Greek version of his name, Cheops. Khufu's son Khafre and grandson Menkaure became pharaohs of Egypt and built their own burial pyramids at Giza. The Old Kingdom ended around 2134 BCE.

After the Old Kingdom ended the provinces of Egypt were ruled by nomarchs, like governors of states. Then the rulers of Thebes took power and moved the capital of Egypt to their city. Three kings from Thebes – Tao I, Kamose and Ahmose – started military campaigns to drive out the foreign rulers who had taken over the northern part of Egypt. Around 1550 BCE what historians call the New Kingdom of Egypt, which included the 18th to 20th dynasties, began.

The pharaohs of the 18th dynasty – Ahmose, Amenhotep I and Tuthmosis I – expanded the Egyptian Empire to the north and south. Hatshepsut, the wife of Tuthmosis II, ruled Egypt after her husband died while his son was too young to rule. She had herself crowned as the first woman pharaoh. Tuthmosis III eventually became pharaoh and history remembers him as a great warrior who led military campaigns against the Syrians. Ramesses II was the builder of many elegant temples and ruled for 67 years. Many of the pharaohs, including the Boy King Tutankhamun, are buried in the Valley of the Kings.