

Ancient Egypt was an ancient civilization of Northeastern Africa, concentrated along the lower reaches of the Nile River in what is now the modern country of Egypt. Egyptian civilization coalesced around 3150 BC (according to conventional Egyptian chronology) with the political unification of Upper and Lower Egypt under the first pharaoh. The history of ancient Egypt occurred in a series of stable *Kingdoms*, separated by periods of relative instability known as *Intermediate Periods*: the Old Kingdom of the Early Bronze Age, the Middle Kingdom of the Middle Bronze Age and the New Kingdom of the Late Bronze Age. Egypt reached the pinnacle of its power during the New Kingdom, in the Ramesside period, after which it entered a period of slow decline. Egypt was invaded or conquered by a succession of foreign powers (such as the Libyans, Nubians, Assyria, Babylonia, Persian rule and Greece) in the Third Intermediate Period of Egypt and Late Period. In the aftermath of Alexander the Great's death, one of his generals, Ptolemy Soter, established himself as the new ruler of Egypt. This Ptolemaic Dynasty ruled Egypt until 30 BC, when it fell to the Roman Empire and became a Roman province.

The success of ancient Egyptian civilization came partly from its ability to adapt to the conditions of the Nile River Valley. The predictable flooding and controlled irrigation of the fertile valley produced surplus crops, which fueled social development and culture. With resources to spare, the administration sponsored mineral exploitation of the valley and surrounding desert regions, the early development of an independent writing system, the organization of collective construction and agricultural projects, trade with surrounding regions, and a military intended to defeat foreign enemies and assert Egyptian dominance. Motivating and organizing these activities was a bureaucracy of elite scribes, religious leaders, and administrators under the control of a Pharaoh who ensured the cooperation and unity of the Egyptian people in the context of an elaborate system of religious beliefs.

The many achievements of the ancient Egyptians include the quarrying, surveying and construction techniques that facilitated the building of monumental pyramids, temples, and obelisks; a system of mathematics, a practical and effective system of medicine, irrigation systems and agricultural production techniques, the first known ships, Egyptian faience and glass technology, new forms of literature, and the earliest known peace treaty with Hittites. Egypt left a lasting legacy. Its art and architecture were widely copied, and its antiquities carried off to far corners of the world. Its monumental ruins have inspired the imaginations of travellers and writers for centuries. A new-found respect for antiquities and excavations in the early modern period led to the scientific investigation of Egyptian civilization and a greater appreciation of its cultural legacy.

The Nile has been the lifeline of its region for much of human history. The fertile floodplain of the Nile gave humans the opportunity to develop a settled agricultural economy and a more sophisticated, centralized society that became a cornerstone in the history of human civilization. Nomadic modern human hunter-gatherers began living in the Nile valley through the end of the Middle Pleistocene some 120 thousand years ago. By the late Paleolithic period, the arid climate of Northern Africa became increasingly hot and dry, forcing the populations of the area to concentrate along the region.

The Ancient Egyptian climate was much less arid than it is today. Large regions of Egypt were covered in treed savanna and traversed by herds of grazing ungulates. Foliage and fauna were far more prolific in all environs and the Nile region supported large populations of waterfowl. Hunting would have been common for Egyptians, and this is also the period when many animals were first domesticated.

During the last predynastic phase, the Naqada culture began using written symbols that eventually evolved into a full system of hieroglyphs for writing the ancient Egyptian language.

Major advances in architecture, art, and technology were made during the Old Kingdom, fueled by the increased agricultural productivity made possible by a well-developed central administration. Some of Ancient Egypt's crowning achievements, the Giza pyramids and Great Sphinx, were constructed during the Old Kingdom. Under the direction of the vizier, state officials collected taxes, coordinated irrigation projects to improve crop yield, drafted peasants to work on construction projects, and established a justice system to maintain peace and order.

Along with the rising importance of a central administration arose a new class of educated scribes and officials who were granted estates by the pharaoh in payment for their services. Pharaohs also made land grants to their mortuary cults and local temples to ensure that these institutions had the resources to worship the pharaoh after his death. It is believed that five centuries of these practices slowly eroded the economic power of the pharaoh, and that the economy could no longer afford to support a large centralized administration. As the power of the pharaoh diminished, regional governors called nomarchs began to challenge the supremacy of the pharaoh. This, coupled with severe droughts between 2200 and 2150 BC, is assumed to have caused the country to enter the 140-year period of famine and strife known as the First Intermediate Period.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Egypt