



## I. Egypt: The Gift of the Nile

Ah yes Egypt. Sitting on the other end of the Fertile Crescent from Mesopotamia lies the Nile River and the home to the world's greatest ancient civilization. Like all the early civilizations, Egypt began around 3000 B.C.E. The first farmers chose the Nile for the river and its life-giving floods. If you look at a map you'll see that Egypt lies at the eastern edge of the Sahara desert. **When the Nile flooded it brought life, when it didn't flood, as it would do on rare occasion, it meant death and starvation.** The Nile was Egypt as without it, Egypt does not exist. Therefore Egypt is often called "the gift of the Nile."

## II. The Power of Pharaoh

Because the Nile was so important, the rulers of Egypt were in charge of controlling it. You see, unlike Sumerian rulers who could communicate with gods, Egyptian rulers were gods themselves.

**Pharaohs:** "great house." Son of Ra. They were god-kings of ancient Egypt and they also assured the Nile floods.

⇒ Pharaoh literally means "great house" because the Egyptians believed that upon being crowned a god took possession of his body. The pharaoh's body was the home to a god. This god's name was;

**Ra:** Egyptian sun god. Lived within pharaoh.

Dress like a pharaoh!

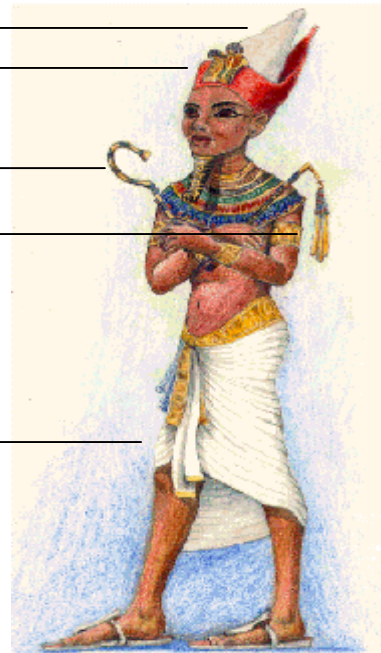
white crown of Upper Egypt \_\_\_\_\_

red crown Lower Egypt \_\_\_\_\_

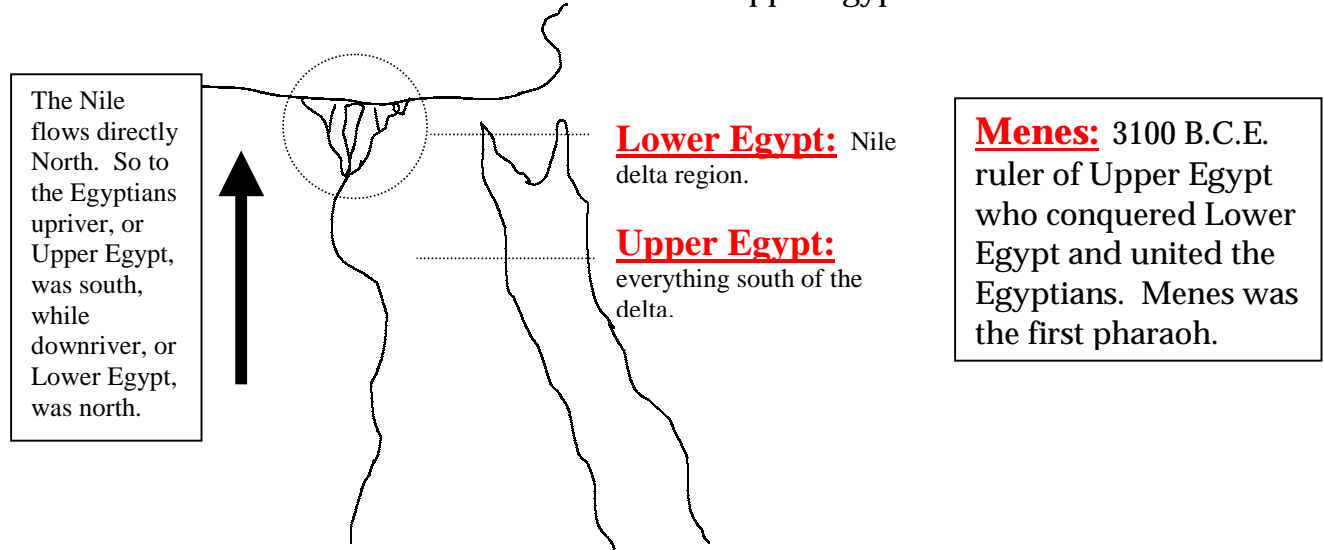
Shepherd's staff showing pharaoh is the shepherd of the Egyptian people. \_\_\_\_\_

Flail – device used to harvest wheat showing pharaoh assures the Nile floods. \_\_\_\_\_

You would wear a skirt too in the desert! \_\_\_\_\_



Unlike the Sumerians, who fought each other in their city-states, the Egyptians were for most of their history a united land ruled by the pharaoh. At one time the Egyptians were divided into the two countries of Lower and Upper Egypt.



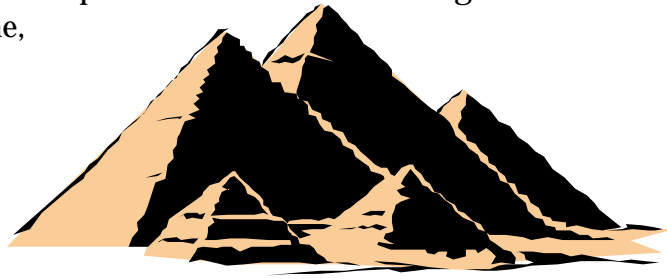
### *III. Monuments worthy of pharaohs and gods*

Since Egypt was united, and not foolishly wasting its strength fighting, Egyptians concentrated on greater matters. For the Egyptians nothing was more important than the afterlife. After all this life was temporary, the afterlife was forever. For pharaohs the afterlife took on an even greater importance. Pharaohs believed that the wealth they enjoyed in life could also be taken into the world of the dead. They could take their possessions with them, and thus the tombs of pharaohs were filled with incredible amounts of gold and wealth, and later robbed by tomb raiders. To foil tomb raiders and to show their magnificence pharaohs began to build the first of the pyramids.

**Pyramids:** grand tombs of pharaoh built of thousands or even millions of stacked limestone blocks. Over a hundred of them litter the sands of Egypt and we are still discovering more.

- ⇒ Where did they get time to build a pyramid? Well not from slaves, but rather during the months that farmer's fields were covered by Nile floods, they worked for their god pharaoh.
- The first pyramid was built by the architect Imhotep, and it looked very much like a ziggurat. Most magnificent of all the pyramids however is:

**The Great Pyramid Complex at Giza:** three greatest pyramids of Egypt guarded by the Great Sphinx. A picture of it is below. The greatest of all these great is simply known as the,

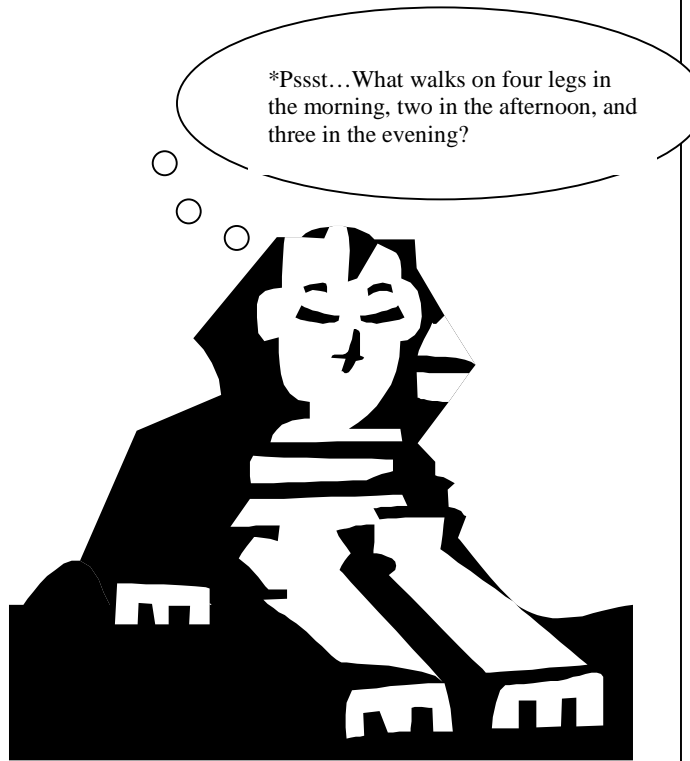


**Great Pyramid:** greatest of all the pyramids and a wonder of time. 480 feet high and one of the world's greatest mysteries. How did they build it?

- 2.5 million limestone blocks, each weigh on average 2.5 million tons. Heaviest of them weigh 70 tons.
- The blocks were chiseled out from limestone cliffs upriver, then floated downstream and canals carried them to the building site.
- The Egyptians built the Great Pyramid at a time when we don't believe they knew of the wheel.
- Built so perfectly and so well that modern engineers don't think we could build it as well ourselves.
- Nothing is written on the pyramid walls. Nothing! Why is that troubling? Well the Egyptians wrote everywhere and if you just built the greatest building of all time wouldn't you put your name on it?
- Unlike other pyramids and tombs, archaeologists believe that we were the first to open the Great Pyramid. However after dynamiting their way in, the great coffin was opened to reveal...nothing. We don't think anyone was buried here.

Weird stuff huh? Its hard to imagine how the Egyptians were able to build this incredible tomb, but it gets weirder. The pyramids at Giza are guarded by the

**Great Sphinx:** head of a person, body of a lion. Massive stone carving and protector of the pyramids. There are hundreds of smaller ones all over Egypt.

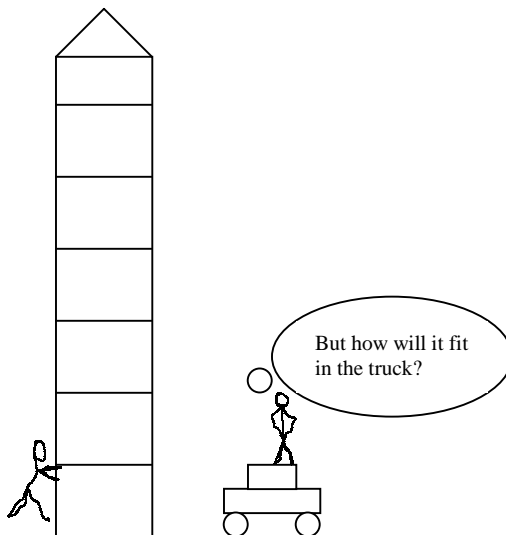


The Sphinx is currently the center of much controversy. It all started when some archaeologists and geologists noticed that the back of the Sphinx is heavily, heavily water eroded as if from rains pounding on its back for thousands of years. What's the problem with this? Well think about it. Egypt is at the eastern edge of the Sahara desert. It doesn't rain here! Well it did rain here during the Ice Age, but that was over 10,000 years ago when Egypt was a grassy plain. Some scientists have thus speculated that maybe the Sphinx is actually over 10,000 years old. But that leads to another problem. The Egyptians began only 5,000 years ago. So if the Sphinx is 10,000 years old then the Egyptians didn't build it, but then who did? My head hurts.

\* The answer is man. He crawls on four legs at birth, walks on two in the afternoon, and in the evening he uses a cane. My head really hurts now.

Well if pyramids and sphinxes weren't enough, pharaohs also had giant stone pillars erected to celebrate their lives and victories in battle. We were so impressed by them that we built one ourselves called the Washington Monument.

**Obelisks:** massive stone pillars celebrating pharaohs. There are hundreds all over Egypt with an average weight of 400 tons. The largest of them weighed 1200 tons.

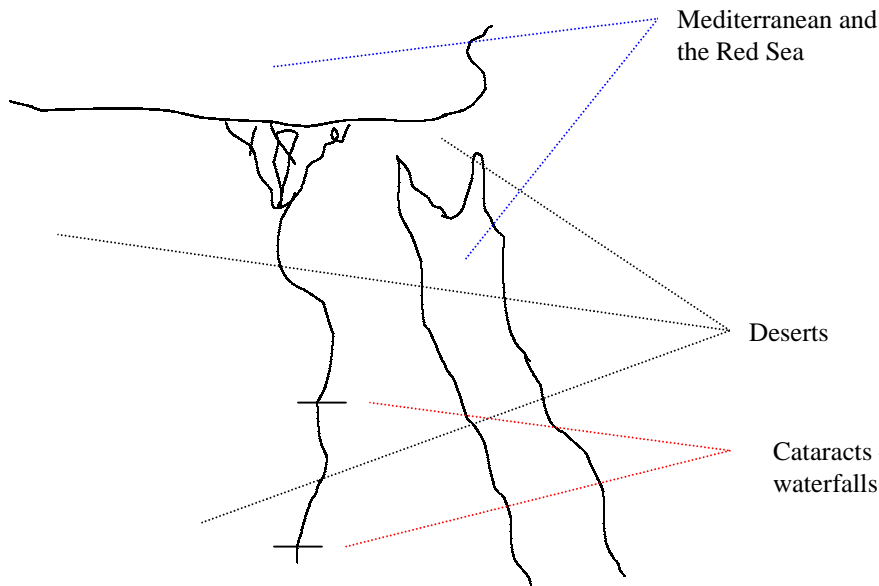


Want to see an Egyptian obelisk? Go to Egypt or you can visit New York's Central Park. One was shipped and erected there in the late 1800's

#### IV. *Why didn't the Sumerians do any of this?*

Remember they did build ziggurats, but the Sumerians were divided into city-states that fought constantly. The Egyptians, on the other hand, because of Menes were united and strong and able to build these wonders. The Egyptians had another advantage over the Sumerians and that had to do with their geography.

##### **Egypt an isolated and protected land.**



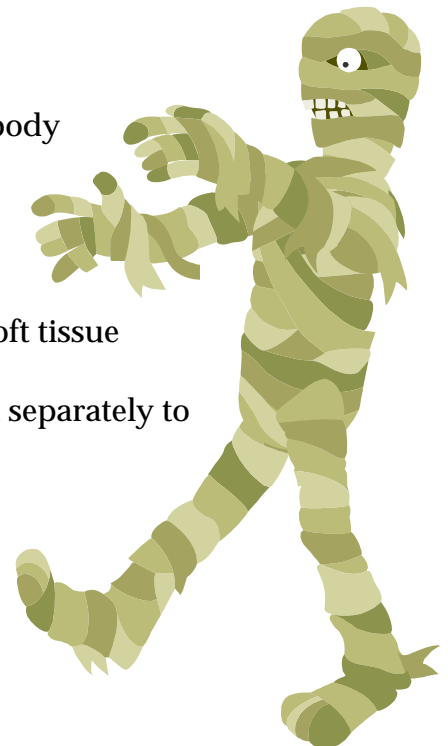
Mesopotamia is conquered over and over again. Well Egypt for thousands of years is rarely invaded despite its riches. The reason? Well look at the map. The easiest way to invade is by ship and not many cultures were able to build warships capable of transporting armies. Remember the seas are salt water so they aren't drinkable. Egypt had many years of peace and did not have to waste its energy on waging war.

#### V. *Pyramids were tombs. But Egyptians believed that the body must also be preserved to serve in the hereafter – Making Mummies!*

**Embalming:** process of preparing and preserving the body for the afterlife.

##### Mummy Recipe (*don't try this on your little brother!*)

- 1) Cut a slit in the abdomen and remove all the soft tissue organs.
- 2) Remove the heart and lungs and prepare them separately to be put in canopic jars.
- 3) Remove the eyes with the thumbs.



- 4) Stick a bronze hooked instrument up the body's nose, and swizzle it around to liquefy the brain.
- 5) Blow air into the ear to force brain juice out the nose.
- 6) Drain the brain out of the skull by moving it back and forth, then sitting the dead body upright.
- 7) Put salt in and around the body and allow two months to dry.
- 8) Wrap carefully in sails or clothe, seal with honey, and bury for eternity.

⇒ Egyptians buried their dead on the west bank of the Nile towards the setting sun where lay the land of the dead. Egyptians lived on the eastern bank of the Nile. Egyptians mummified rich, poor, cats, bulls and crocodiles.

## *VI. The Egyptian afterlife: What was it anyway and how do you get there?*

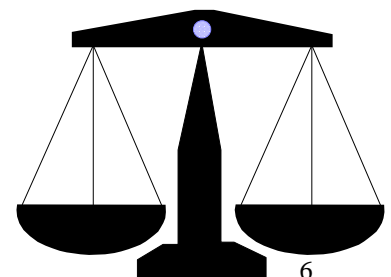
Like the Sumerian afterlife the Egyptian afterlife wasn't good or bad, it's just where you went when you died. But not everyone got there. In order to get to the afterlife you had to pass certain tests or challenges after you died.

### ***Steps to the Egyptian Afterlife***

- 1) Journey to the afterlife. (3, 4 days)
- 2) Meet **Osiris**: green skinned god of the dead.
- 3) Tell him passages from the **Book of the Dead**: magical spells and chants to get into the afterlife. Want to read the book? <http://www.lysator.liu.se/~drokk/BoD/>
- 4) **Scales of Truth**: heart is weighed against a feather. The heart symbolizes your sins, the feather symbolizes a good life.

⇒ If your heart is heavy with sin and heavier than the feather then you will be devoured by a horrible crocodilian type creature and you cease to exist.

⇒ If your heart is less than or equal to the feather, then you proceed to the afterlife.



## VII. Egyptian Gods and Goddesses:

Like the Sumerians, the Egyptians were polytheistic – believing in many gods. Unlike them, however, the Egyptians pictured their gods with the heads of animals and beasts. The gods could transform themselves into any animal or shape, but the Egyptians represented them with an animal head to show their chief power or what they were the god of. For instance, it makes sense that the god of the Nile, Sobek, would be pictured with the head of the most fearsome creature in the river, the crocodile. Therefore Sobek is the crocodile headed god of the Nile. Below is a list of just some of the more important Egyptian gods and goddesses.



**Ra or** – hawk headed, sun god – most powerful of the gods

**Osiris** – green god of the underworld – god of the harvest

**Isis** – wife, sister of Osiris

**Anubis** – jackal headed protector of the dead

**Seth** – brother Osiris and Isis, god of disorder

**Horus** – son Osiris and Isis, god of the skies and time

**Sobek** – crocodile headed, god of the Nile

**Taweret** – hippo headed, lion pawed goddess of childbirth

**Bes** – pudgy, lion headed dwarf. God of laughter.

⇒ The Egyptians also had many magical, sacred signs and symbols which, along with their gods, were carved all over their tombs and temples (except in the Great Pyramid).

- **Eye of Ra**



- **Eye of Horus**



I know I know, it's the same eyeball just flipped over. The single eye represented either Horus or Ra and it symbolized that the gods were everywhere and saw everything. Creepy!

- **Ankh**: Egyptian symbol of life.



Look in the hands of carvings of Egyptian gods and pharaohs, and it is this you shall see them clutching.

- **Scarab beetles** – sacred dung beetle. As the beetle pushes its ball of dung across the desert, so does the scarab push the sun across the sky.
- Cobras – considered the protectors of pharaohs.

My list could go on and on, but this highlights some of the main ones. Every animal in some way was sacred to the Egyptians because they all represented a god or goddess.

## VIII. *How do we know all of this stuff about Egypt?*

Once we knew little of the ancient Egyptian's history. Even though their writing littered temple and tomb walls we couldn't read it. Their writing is a form of picture writing with thousands of symbols called:



**Hieroglyphs:** picture writing with thousands of different symbols.

Many historians believe we probably would never have figured out Egyptian writing if it wasn't for a chance discovery that is probably the greatest archaeological find ever called;

**Rosetta Stone:** funeral tablet discovered when an old building was being dismantled in the early 1800's by Napoleon's army in Egypt. It was the key to deciphering hieroglyphs. The tablet had the same passage written in Greek, Demotic- another type of Egyptian writing, and hieroglyphs. Because we could read the Greek and also the Demotic, scholars were able to translate the hieroglyphs.

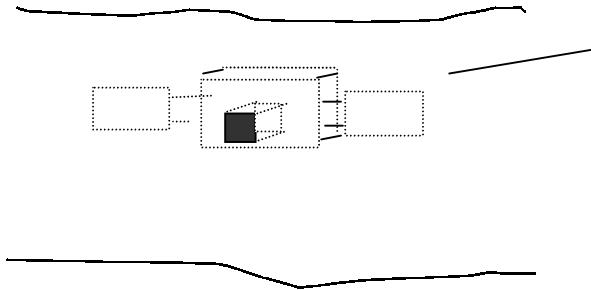
⇒ The Egyptians not only wrote on walls of temples and tombs, but they also developed their own paper called;

**Papyrus:** woody reed that grows along the Nile from which the Egyptians made paper. Unlike the Sumerians the Egyptians never had to rely on clay tablets to keep their records.

## *IX: Egypt during the New Kingdom 1600 – 1100 B.C.E.*

The Egyptians were such a great civilization for so long that historians divide Egyptian history into three parts calling them the Old, Middle and New Kingdom. It was during the Old Kingdom from 2800 – 2300 B.C.E. that the pyramids were built. However pyramid building ceased during the Middle and New Kingdoms being too expensive and too ineffective. They were supposed to keep out grave robbers, but if anything, pyramids were beacons to looters from miles around. New Kingdom pharaohs tried a different approach to safeguarding their loot for the next world.

**Valley of the Kings:** valley in the desert surrounded on three sides by high stone cliffs.



Tunneled into solid rock, it is in the Valley of the Kings where Egypt's greatest pharaohs were entombed. Some of the tombs had over one hundred rooms and chambers. Others were simpler and smaller. The ultimate goal of the Valley was to foil grave robbers. It failed miserably. Some of the grave robbers were later pharaohs themselves, who finding themselves strapped for cash, knew where to look for a little treasure. There was also a separate Valley of the Queens for the wives of pharaohs.

The Valley was a failure yes. But not a complete one. All the tombs in the Valley were robbed except one. And in 1922 a lucky archaeologist found it ☺

**King Tut's tomb:** unrobbed tomb uncovered by Howard Carter. Pharaoh Tutankhamen was an unimportant boy pharaoh who was murdered probably by his uncle who became pharaoh after him. Even though he was unimportant the tomb contained incredible, fabulous wealth and treasure.



*Curse? Did somebody say Curse?*

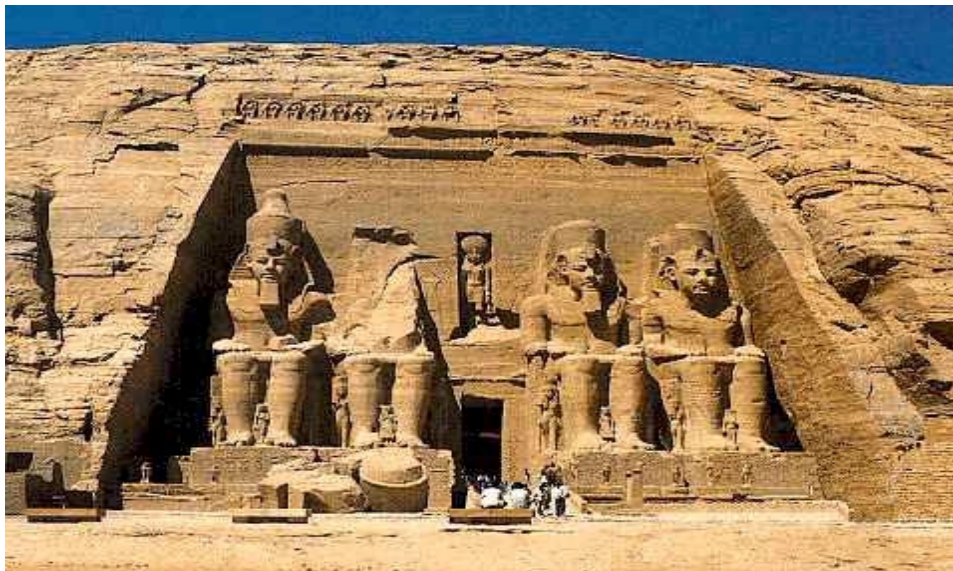
\*King Tut pictured here with his wife. She was also his sister!

## IX. Great pharaohs of the New Kingdom

Even though they didn't build any pyramids, the New Kingdom was the time of Egypt's greatest prosperity. Tut himself was a New Kingdom pharaoh. The reason this is a time of greatness is that the Egyptians abandoned their traditional isolationism of the deserts and stormed out to conquer empires of their own. Some of their more interesting pharaohs of this time are listed below.

- ⇒ **Hatshepsut**: powerful woman pharaoh of Egypt. Ruled for ten years. To demonstrate she was the true son of Ra she wore a false chin beard and a man's clothing.
- ⇒ Amenhotep IV or **Akhenaten**: pharaoh who told the Egyptians there was only one all powerful god named Aten. Changed his name from Amenhotep to Akhenaten – “son of Aten” to reflect this. Forced the Egyptians to give up their old gods for his god. The result was civil war. Akhenaten was removed and the old gods were restored. We remember him as the 1<sup>st</sup> **monotheist**: believing in one god.
- ⇒ **Ramses II or the Great**: conquered an empire which included Canaan, parts of Turkey and Mesopotamia. Had over 90 wives and fathered 100 children, lived into his 90's while ruling for over 70 years.

**Temple of Abu Simbel**: Ramses greatest temple with four colossal statues of himself.

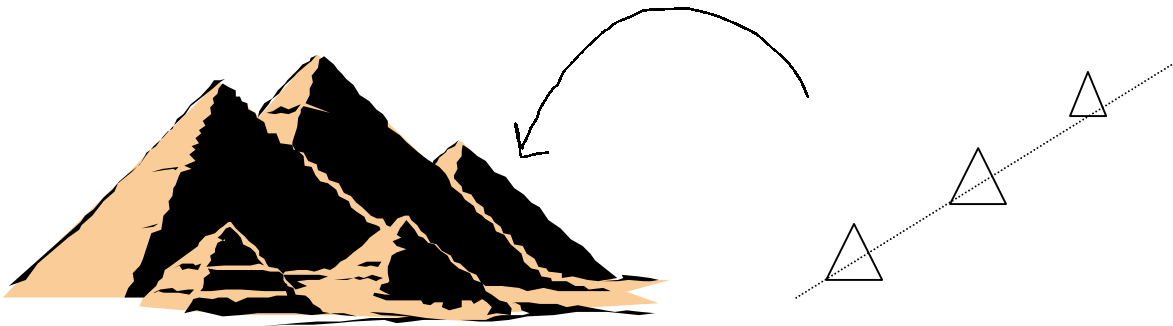


Want more? [http://www.ccer.ggl.ruu.nl/abu\\_simbel/abu\\_simbel1.html](http://www.ccer.ggl.ruu.nl/abu_simbel/abu_simbel1.html)

## *X. Inevitably the power of Egypt fades, but the Mysteries remain!*

Egypt's greatness faded and by 663 B.C.E. they were raided and sacked by the Assyrians, then later to be conquered by the Emperor Cambyses of the Persians in 525 B.C.E. Various conquerors then rule over the glittering Nile including Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, and Mohammed's Islamic hordes. But none of this is important for you to know. Egypt is a favorite topic of historians and school children around the world because there are just so many unanswerable questions and mysteries that beg for us to look deeper in the sands. We've mentioned a couple already what with the perfection of the Great Pyramid and the water erosion marks on the back of the Sphinx. Let me show you another fascinating fact before we leave Egypt.

When you look at the Great Pyramid Complex at Giza what you will notice is that the first two large pyramids line up in a line while the third is not in alignment. Scholars often wondered why. Well now we think we know the answer.



This is the constellation Orion. It is one of the most recognized constellations because of its three brilliant stars that form Orion's Belt. For the Egyptians, however, Orion was the constellation of Osiris, the green god of the underworld. Now look at the belt and look at the alignment of the pyramids. Look familiar? Remember pyramids were portals for the pharaoh to go from this world to the next and thus the greatest of the pyramids were built in homage to the great god Osiris. Neat stuff eh?