Egypt

**Badarian**
By 5000 BC simple farming based on cattle herding and cereal cultivation had replaced a combination of foraging and cultivation along Nile as far south as the Sudan. This marked pre-Dynastic period.

Two regions: Upper and Lower Egypt. Lower: Nile delta upstream to modern Cairo. Upper: as far south as First Cataract, near modern Aswan.

Contrast with Mesopotamia: state formation occurred in a region with relatively low population density and plenty of vacant land.

Kemp’s Monopoly game analogy to explain community interaction and competition.

Ideology important: wove distinctive ideology which connected leadership and authority with elaborate symbols and rituals: ideologies powerful factor in promoting unification.

Process of state formation hard to trace. See development of larger settlements and leaders buried with elaborate grave goods: symbols pointing to emerging ideology of power.

**Amratian (3800-3500 BC)**
At least three pre-Dynastic kingdoms in Upper Egypt around 3500 BC. (Nagada, Hierakonpolis and This)

Hierakonpolis (Nekhen) – the “City of the Falcon” – small community in 3800 BC, with only several hundred residents. During next three centuries, increased to about 10,000. Differences in residences: some artisans and traders in larger houses with separate compounds. Most people in closely clustered mud-brick buildings. Cemetery: some citizens prominent – many prosperous traders who profited from Plum Red pottery. Image from one tomb: ruler smiting enemies and sitting under an awning.

About 3500 BC: fragile ecological balance of desert and grassland collapsed. Why? Most likely overgrazing by sheep and goats and deforestation resulting from firing of kilns.

May have created an opportunity for a few: wealth used to foster irrigation agriculture and settlement closer to Nile. It worked: large surpluses produced and controlled by elite. Wealth used to increase trade, erect public buildings such as temples and build impressive tombs.

**Gerzean (3500-3100 BC)**
Narmer palette: King Narmer’s victory over northern ruler in about 3000 BC. Wears crown of Upper and Lower Egypt, symbolic linking of Horus and Seth.
Probably a number of polities in Lower Egypt during this time period, but now buried under great quantities of silt. One that is known: Maadi (near Cairo). Major trading center in about 3650 BC. Goods from eastern Mediterranean and perhaps even from Mesopotamia.

From Nagada in Upper Egypt: cylinder seal of Mesopotamian form, pots with images of Mesopotamian boats, and other motifs derived from that area.

**Writing**
Formerly thought to have been brought to Egypt via contact with Mesopotamia. Now, appears independently invented. Hieroglyphs. Priests developed a script that was easier to produce with papyrus-reed paper and ink than on clay as in Mesopotamia. Used for trade and record keeping, but association with recording of funerary rituals on painted pots significant.

Cursive hieroglyphic script developed: much easier to use. Only consonants written. Writing a factor in unification of Egypt.

**Unification Scenario**
Suspected that by 3500 BC Upper Egypt may have bypassed Lower Egypt in contacts with southern Arabia and Southwest Asia. Conflict resulted. Rulers of Hierakonpolis began campaign of military conquest.

Key concepts for ancient Egyptians: symbolic geography, balanced opposites. Potential of world between chaos and order. Disorder could be contained by rule of kings and by power of the sun.

In fourth millennium BC, larger villages became focal points of different territories, which later became the nomes (provinces) through which pharaohs governed.

**Intensification of Agriculture and Irrigation**
Irrigation technology quite rudimentary – early rulers unable to organize elaborate forms of irrigation. But, even what was done probably required considerable organization. Pharaoh, as divine leader, responsible for success of harvest. So, as we’ve seen elsewhere, famine years threatened the ruler – the old “Who is the matter?” question raised. Some periods of political instability coincided with poor flood years and rapid successions of ineffective pharaohs.

Egyptian society as a pyramid: balance between flatter and steeper.

**Archaic Egypt and Creation of the Great Culture (2920-2575 BC)**
Four broad periods: Archaic Egypt and the Old Kingdom, the Middle Kingdom, the New Kingdom, and the Later Period. First three separated by two intermediate periods – times of political change and instability.

**Archaic Period**
First four and a half centuries of Egyptian civilization: period of consolidation during which local chiefdoms subordinated into unified whole. Narmer and his
successors assume great power: “invent” pharaonic tradition. At center of state: a great king, a terrestrial ruler who symbolized triumph or order over chaos.

Power in this period tied to skillful administration: control of agricultural surpluses and labor. Taxation and redistribution. Record keeping through an army of officials to monitor every transaction – inventoried everything – even loaves produced by bakers.

System tested: Between 3000 and 2800 BC floods dropped 3 to 5 feet (30% below normal).

First and Second Dynasty kings developed mortuary complex into symbol of kingship.

**The Old Kingdom and the Pyramids (c. 2575-2134 BC)**

Third Dynasty pharaoh Djoser (Zoser): created large enclosure to symbolize his role as territorial claimant. Dominated by Stepped Pyramid at Saqqara.

Djoser and his predecessors were terrestrial monarchs, but new image of kingship emerged after his death in 2649 BC.

Pyramids as symbolic ladders to heaven. Later become associated with the rays of the sun bursting through the clouds.

**The Egyptian State**

First state of its size in history. Pharaohs ruled by their own word, no written laws (unlike legislators of Mesopotamian city states). Pharaoh had power over Nile flood, rainfall, and all people, including foreigners. A god, personification of Ma’at (rightness).

Massive bureaucracy: tax collection a major endeavor, as was supervision of harvest and administration of irrigation. Army of 20,000 at height of prosperity. Trained scribes integral part of government. Special schools trained writers for careers in army, palace, treasury and many other occupations.

Depended on slave labor for some public works and considerable domestic service. Foreign serfs and war prisoners could have considerable influence in public affairs; could rent and cultivate land.

**The First Intermediate Period and the Middle Kingdom (2134-1640 BC)**

Decline in monarchy and increase in power of local leaders in provinces coincided with prolonged drought cycle which began in 2250 BC. Successes of earlier pharaohs led to increase in population to over 1 million by 2250 BC. Intensification of agriculture increased vulnerability: many more mouths to feed.

Rebel movement in Thebes in 2134 BC: Middle Kingdom pharaohs that resulted were less despotic and more energetic.
The Second Intermediate Period (1640-1530 BC)
End of Middle Kingdom marked by period of instability and economic disorder. Disputes over succession. Hyksos seize power in Lower Egypt.

The New Kingdom (1530-1070 BC)
Rulers from Thebes win independence from Hyksos: Ahmose the Liberator. Turned Egypt into efficiently run military state. Pharaoh now a national hero, a military leader: imperial ruler, skilled general.

It was during this period that Tutankhamen (1333-1323 BC) and Rameses II (1290-1224) ruled.

The Late Period (1070-332 BC)
With the death of Rameses III in 1070 Egypt enters period of political weakness.

Mummies
First attempts to preserve bodies of dead occur during First Dynasty, around 3000 BC

Why do it?
Survival of body believed necessary for survival other aspects of the person, including the “ka”. Ka a spiritual copy of body that needed everything the living person had needed. Would stay in vicinity of body.

Magical spells used to transform mummy to an akh: aim to avoid the second death, from which no return. Also necessary to preserve the name, which encapsulated the person’s true essence.

Mummification reached height in 21st Dynasty.

Process
Lengthy ritual taking (ideally) 70 days.

Mummification process has been experimentally recreated – recently featured on PBS program and in Archaeology magazine.

Analyzing the Mummies
Autopsies, X-rays, CAT scans, DNA analysis provide a wealth of information on pharaohs and other royals as well as commoners.

General state of health. Diseases such as arthritis, arteriosclerosis, pneumoconiosis, dental caries and abscesses as well as parasites such as tapeworms, trichinella, schistosome. Sooty deposits in lungs.

Refer to text for discussion of tombs.