

Chapter 8

Kings and Queens

Objectives

To learn about the role of the pharaohs and their wives, and to identify the symbols associated with the office of the pharaoh.

Mystery

The kings and queens of ancient Egypt depicted themselves as being incredibly self-confident. Where did they get their highly developed sense of purpose? What symbols did they use to reinforce their position as powerful rulers?

Discussion and Research Projects

1. How did the pharaohs explain their relationship with the gods? How did the explanation proposed in the Old Kingdom evolve in the Middle Kingdom?
2. How did we find out about the deeds of the pharaohs?
3. Look at images of the kings. Can you tell what activities kings engaged in?
4. How did the kings reinforce their image as powerful rulers?
5. Not all images of kings doing heroic deeds were true to life. Why did kings create these images of themselves if they were not true?
6. What did the pharaohs think would happen to them if they were not just rulers?
7. How were new pharaohs chosen?
8. What is a bureaucracy?
9. What position did pharaohs hold in the bureaucracy? What duties did they perform?

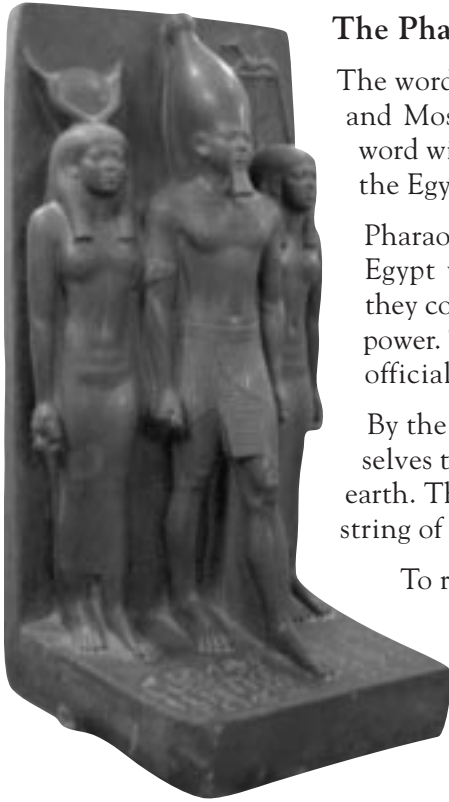


10. Next to the pharaoh, who was the most powerful person? What were his duties?
11. Did the merit principle apply to the appointment of officials in the pharaoh's administration? What factors determined who got high positions in the pharaoh's government?
12. What code of behaviour governed civil servants in their relationship with their superiors?
13. Why did pharaohs sometimes marry women they were related to?
14. What did royal women wear or carry that signified their royalty?
15. Why do you think pharaohs had many wives?
16. Name some of the powerful women in ancient Egypt? What were they famous for?
17. What circumstances led Queen Hatshepsut to seize the throne and declare herself pharaoh of Egypt? Why do you think she wanted to be pharaoh?
18. What type of work did the pharaoh's wives do in the royal palaces?
19. What type of rivalry may have existed between the pharaoh's wives and children?
20. Name the symbols that surround drawings of royalty and deities, and explain their purpose.
21. What symbols do the royals hold in their hands to indicate their station in life?
22. Which symbols represent the idea of protection?
23. Which symbols are related to the creation myth?
24. Which symbols are associated with eternal life?
25. Compare the royal symbols of the ancient Egyptians with those of other ancient cultures. Which of these symbols are still used today to denote royalty?

Creative Projects

1. Use **Activity Sheet 18** to learn to identify various royal symbols.
2. Compare the headgear worn by royalty and deities. Draw the various types of headgear and explain their symbolic meaning.
3. Write an imaginary interview with one of the pharaoh's wives. Ask about her relationship with her husband, her children and the members of her extended family.
4. Try inventing a symbol for: a) life; b) protection; c) love; d) death; or e) anything else you can think of.

FACT SHEET: The Kings and Queens of Ancient Egypt



King Menkaure (fourth dynasty) flanked by the goddess Hathor (left) and a female figure representing a district of Egypt. Menkaure would have been considered a god. This statue was found in the temple of his pyramid.

CMC ECD98-028 #78 (photo)

The Pharaoh as Religious Leader

The word “pharaoh” comes from the Bible. It was first used by Joseph and Moses in the “Second Book of Kings”. Although we use this word without distinction, it is an anachronism when used to refer to the Egyptian kings prior to the eighteenth dynasty.

Pharaohs began ruling Egypt in 3000 B.C., when Upper and Lower Egypt were united. During the Old Kingdom (2575-2134 B.C.), they considered themselves to be living gods who ruled with absolute power. They built pyramids as testimony of their greatness but left no official records of their achievements.

By the Middle Kingdom, the pharaohs no longer considered themselves to be living gods, but rather the representatives of the gods on earth. They left records of their deeds, but these were no more than a string of titles and laudatory epithets.

To reinforce their image as powerful divine rulers, the pharaohs represented themselves in writings and sculptured reliefs on temple walls. They often depicted themselves as warriors who single-handedly killed scores of enemies and slaughtered a whole pride of lions. Similar depictions were repeated by one pharaoh after another, which leads one to question the validity of the scenes. For example, the war pictures of Ramses III at Karnak are exact copies of those of Ramses II. These deeds of heroism were, in part, designed for propaganda purposes. They reinforced the position of the king as head of state rather than reflecting historical reality.



The pyramid of Mycerinus at Giza

CMC S97 10283



Pharaoh Den smiting an Asian enemy with a mace. His name is written in the serekh in front of his face.

In the fourth century B.C., a high priest and scribe of the sacred shrines of Egypt named Manetho compiled the first comprehensive list of the pharaohs. He grouped their reigns into dynastic divisions that to a large degree are still considered accurate today. The dynasties are grouped into several periods, starting with the Early Period (2920–2575 B.C.) and ending with the Late Period (712–332 B.C.). The first dynasty began with the legendary King Menes (who is believed to have been King Narmer), and the last one ended in 343 B.C. when Egypt fell to the Persians. Nectanebo II was the last Egyptian-born pharaoh to rule the country.

Not all the pharaohs were men, nor were they all Egyptian. Before the Graeco-Roman Period, at least three women ascended the throne, the most important being Queen Hatshepsut. Over several periods, Egypt was dominated by foreign powers that appointed kings from their own ranks.

Exactly how successive pharaohs were chosen is not entirely clear. Sometimes a son of the pharaoh, or a powerful vizier (head priest) or feudal lord assumed the leadership, or an entirely new line of pharaohs arose following the collapse of the former monarchy. For example, Tutankhamun was succeeded by his elderly chief advisor, Ay, who was not of royal birth.



A pharaoh striking an enemy. Bas-relief carving on a wall at Medinet Habu.

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Pharaoh Amenophis I reigned for a quarter of a century and led a successful military expedition to Kush, a land to the south of Egypt that was rich in gold.

CMC ECD98-024 #89 (photo)



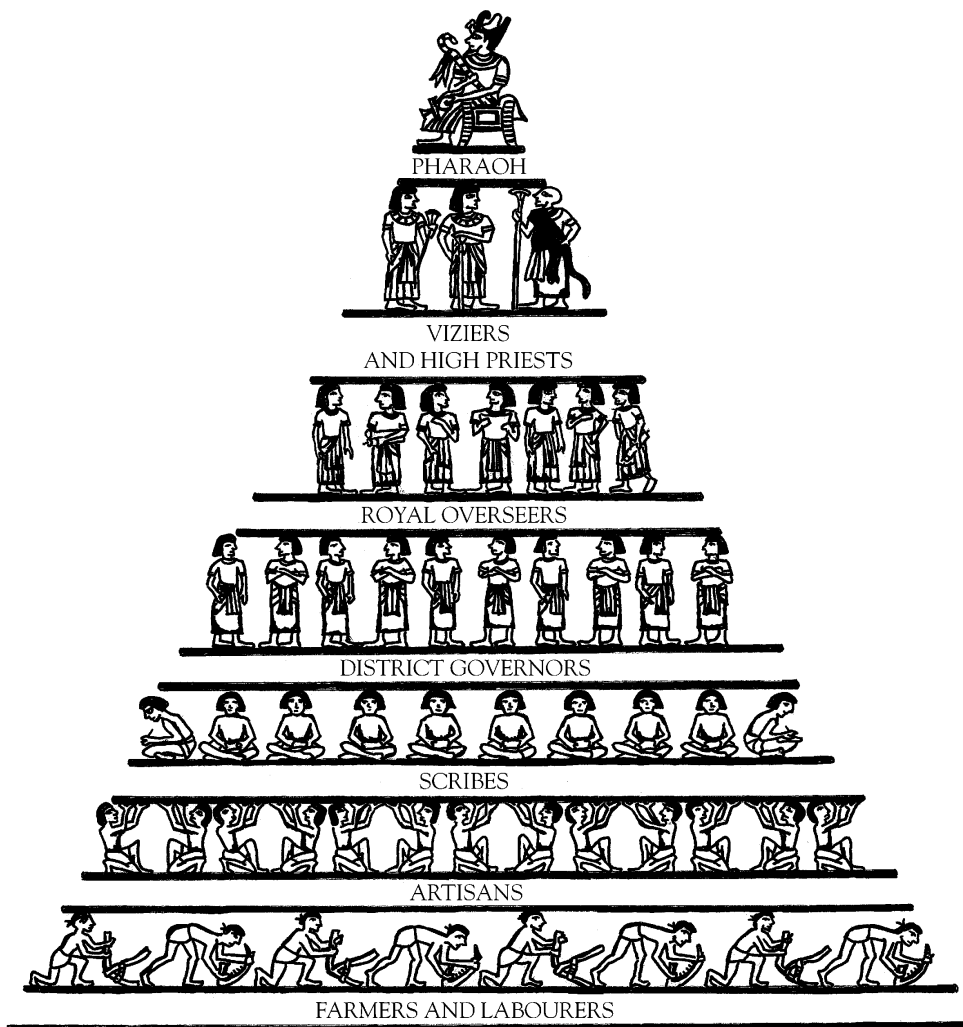
A statue of Amenophis III (right), shown next to one of the god Sobek. Amenophis III reigned for almost 40 years during one of ancient Egypt's most prosperous and stable periods.

CMC ECD98-034 #15 (photo)

Bureaucracy

Bureaucracy is not a modern invention; it was conceived by the Egyptians over 5,000 years ago. The creation of a bureaucracy in the Old Kingdom was a key factor in the inception of the Egyptian civilization. The king was the supreme head of state. Next to him, the most powerful officer in the hierarchy was the vizier, the executive head of the bureaucracy. The position of vizier was filled by a prince or a person of exceptional ability. His title is translated as “superintendent of all works of the king”.

As the supreme judge of the state, the vizier ruled on all petitions and grievances brought to the



The Egyptian Hierarchy
 Drawing: Catherine Fitzpatrick

court. All royal commands passed through his hands before being transmitted to the scribes in his office. They in turn dispatched orders to the heads of distant towns and villages, and dictated the rules and regulations related to the collection of taxes.

The king was surrounded by the court, friends and favoured people who attained higher administrative positions. The tendency was to fill these positions on the basis of heredity. One of the most ardent wishes of these administrators was to climb the bureaucratic ladder through promotions and to hand their offices to their children.

Many concepts in modern bureaucracies can be traced to the Egyptians. The hierarchical structure and code of ethics of the Egyptian bureaucracy are echoed in modern governments. Ancient Egyptian bureaucrats, who aspired to higher positions, were counselled to obey their superiors and keep silence in all circumstances,¹² in other words, not to contradict or challenge the wisdom of those in charge. They were expected to have tact and good manners, be faithful in delivering messages, and display humility that verged on subservience.¹³ It is perhaps for these reasons that Egyptian officials were called civil servants, a designation that governments have adopted down through the ages.



Monumental statue of Ramses II, one of the most powerful Egyptian pharaohs
CMC ECD98-019 #275

Royal Women

Royal mothers, wives and daughters derived their status from their relationship with the king. Kings had many wives and royal families were large. The most prolific was Ramses II, who had eight wives and over a hundred children. To keep the royal bloodline pure, kings often married within their family, a sister or half sister, for example. In a few cases, they married their daughters, although it is not clear whether or not these marriages were true conjugal unions.

The status of royal women is evident in Egyptian art. One of the oldest royal insignia worn

by queens is the vulture headdress. The vulture's wings and body were spread over a tightly fitted cap, and the head jutted out at the front. The uraeus (cobra) head could be substituted for the vulture head. Both the vulture and the cobra served to protect the wearer from harm. They were the most characteristic marks of kingship and may have also been, by association, a symbol of divine queenship.

Another royal symbol worn by women from the thirteenth dynasty onward was a pair of falcon plumes mounted on a circular support. Similar double-feather headdresses were worn by Min, the fertility god, Amun, the creator god, and Hathor, the powerful goddess who controlled the cycles of nature. Like deities and kings, royal women are seen holding symbols such as the *ankh* (symbol of life), the *sistrum* (rattle) and the *menit* necklace.



Queen Nefertari wearing a vulture headdress surmounted by a pair of falcon plumes.



The nobleman Hunefer and his wife with arms raised in praise of the gods

Photo: Harry Foster (CMC S98 3568)



Queen Nefertari, wife of Ramses II, wearing a vulture headdress

Girls born to royal wives were given the title “king’s daughters” to distinguish them from those of non-royal wives. Royal wives were called the king’s principal wives to distinguish them from the others, although the principal wife was not always of royal birth. An example is Queen Tiy, the wife of Amenhotep III, Tutankhanum’s grandfather. Daughters of foreign kings were sometimes wed to the pharaohs in diplomatic marriages. Not all these women had children by the king, however. Many were engaged in spinning,

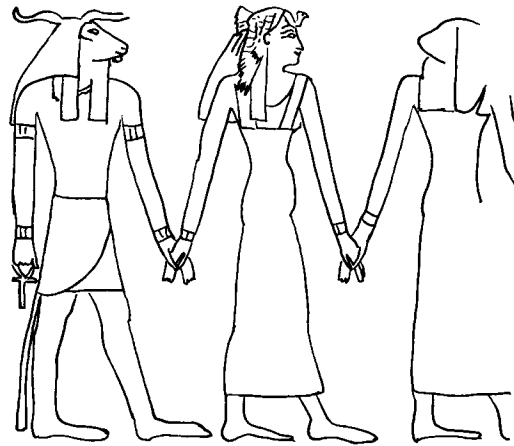


Queen Hatshepsut was depicted on a temple wall dressed like a pharaoh with a beard and a slender masculine body.

weaving and other household duties within the various palaces throughout Egypt.

Little is known about the queens, but there are exceptions.

Ahmose-Nefertari, the wife, and sister, of the first pharaoh of the eighteenth dynasty, King Ahmose, became a very powerful queen. She was the first in the history of Egypt to be given the title of God’s Wife. When her son died, there was no obvious heir to the throne, so an army general, Thutmose I, became king. Upon his death, his son, Thutmose II, ruled with his half sister Hatshepsut. When he died, Hatshepsut took command and ruled Egypt as a pharaoh for 20 years. This was the first time a woman wielded such power and influence over the affairs of the state. During the Graeco-Roman period, Cleopatra VII was the most illustrious queen. Since the rulers of this period were of Macedonian (Greek or Roman) descent, they are not included in the list of Egyptian rulers of the pharaonic era.



Queen Ahmose-Nefertari, pregnant with her daughter Hatshepsut, is led to the birthing room by the gods

Royal Symbols¹⁴

Egyptian art is rich in symbols related to royalty and its religious beliefs. By learning to read these symbols, one can gain a better understanding and appreciation of Egyptian art. Below are a few of the most common symbols.

Ankh

In the shape of a mirror or a knot, the *ankh* is a symbol of life. It was often carried by deities or people in a funeral procession, or offered to the king as the breath of life.



Cartouche

A cartouche is an elliptical outline representing a length of rope that encloses the names of royal persons in hieroglyphs. It symbolized the pharaoh’s status as ruler of all that the sun encircled. Napoleon’s soldiers gave the cartouche its name. The word is derived from the Italian *cartoccio*, meaning a cornet of paper (a piece of paper rolled into the shape of a cone).



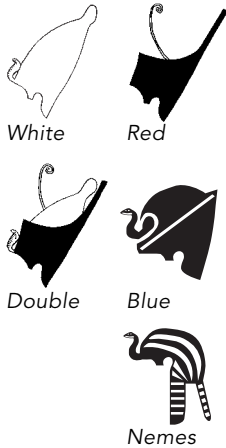
In Italian art, the names of the people represented in paintings were enclosed in a drawing of a *cartoccio*.

Crook and Flail



The crook and flail are two of the most prominent items in the royal regalia. Kings held them across their chest. The crook, in the shape of a shepherd's staff, is a sceptre symbolizing government and may be related to the concept of a good shepherd leading his flock.

Crowns and Headgear



Egyptian kings and gods are depicted wearing different crowns and headdresses. Before 3000 B.C., there was the white crown of Upper Egypt and the red crown of Lower Egypt. When Egypt was united, these two crowns were amalgamated into the Double Crown of Upper and Lower Egypt. Starting in the eighteenth dynasty, kings also wore the blue crown, and the white crown with a plume on either side and a small disk at the top.

Kings are often represented wearing the *nemes* headcloth, a piece of cloth pulled tight across the forehead and tied at the back, with two flaps hanging on the sides. Cobra (uraeus) and vulture heads were worn on the forehead. Kings shaved their heads but had a prominent beard.

Gold



The Egyptian symbol for gold is a collar with beads along the lower edge. Gold has long been associated with the gods and royalty. This imperishable metal reflects the brilliance of the sun and the hope of eternal life. Isis and Nephthys, two of the goddesses who protected the dead, are often shown kneeling on the gold sign at the ends of royal coffins.

Isis Knot



This sign is similar to the *ankh* sign, but rather than having a horizontal bar, it has two arms that are bent downward. It is closely associated with the *djed* pillar that represents Osiris, Isis's husband, and symbolizes the binary nature of life itself.

Lotus



The blue lotus was a symbol of the sun god and the pharaohs. Like the sun that sets in the evening and rises in the morning, the lotus flower blooms in the day and closes each night. In one version of the creation myth, the sun first rose out of a giant lotus flower that bloomed on the primordial mound. The lotus thus became a symbol of rebirth, the renewal of life and the promise of everlasting life.

Menit Necklace

This heavy beaded necklace with a crescent front piece and a counterweight at the back is associated with the goddess Hathor. It serves as a medium to transfer the goddess's power to the pharaoh. The pharaoh's wife is sometimes depicted offering the necklace to her husband, since she is the earthly representative of Hathor.



Reed and Bee

The Egyptian word *nsw* (he who belongs to the reed) is a symbol for Upper Egypt, and the word *bit* (he who belongs to the bee) is a symbol for Lower Egypt. When placed together, they represent the domain of the pharaoh, ruler of Upper and Lower Egypt.



Papyrus

A water plant, the papyrus symbolizes the primeval marshes of the creation story. The heraldic plant of Lower Egypt, it was used to decorate columns in temples built by the pharaohs.



Scarab

The scarab's habit of laying its eggs in a ball of dung, which is then rolled along the ground and dropped into a hole, made it an obvious symbol for the sun god. It represented the rising sun god and, through association, the pharaohs.



Shen Ring

The circular *shen* ring represents the concept of eternity, having no beginning and no end. It is associated with the solar disk, the serpent that bites its tail, and divine birds that are often shown holding the sign in their claws.



Sistrum

A ceremonial instrument, the sistrum is a rattle that is often shaped like the *ankh* symbol. It is associated with the goddess Hathor, and its sound is thought to bring protection and divine blessing through fertility and rebirth.



Sceptres

The sceptre, or rod, is one of the oldest and most enduring symbols associated with royalty and the deities. Two types of sceptres are found in Egyptian art. The *was*, a symbol of power and dominion, has a straight shaft, a crooked handle in the shape of an animal head and a forked base. The *sekhem* symbolizes divine power and has a straight shaft with an enlarged cylindrical end.



Was



Sekhem



Uraeus

The uraeus represents a rearing cobra with a flared hood. The cobra is associated with the sun god, the kingdom of Lower Egypt, the kings and their families, and several deities. A symbol of protection, it guards the gates of the underworld, wards off the enemies of the royals and guides the deceased pharaohs on their journey through the underworld.



Vulture

The vulture was the symbol of Upper Egypt. Pharaohs wore the uraeus (cobra) and the head of a vulture on their foreheads as symbols of royal protection. The goddess Nekhbet was also portrayed as a vulture.