



T5: Egypt: Unification and Old Kingdom

Egypt and Mesopotamia: contrasts

- Almost as old as Mesopotamian civilizations
- More stable compared to Mesopotamia
- More pleasant climate
- Availability of metals & building stone in contrast to Mesopotamian mud-brick
- Regular flood of Nile was in contrast to unpredictable flooding of Tigris and Euphrates
- Natural barriers (desert, Mediterranean Sea, Nile cataracts) in contrast to Mesopotamian open plain land

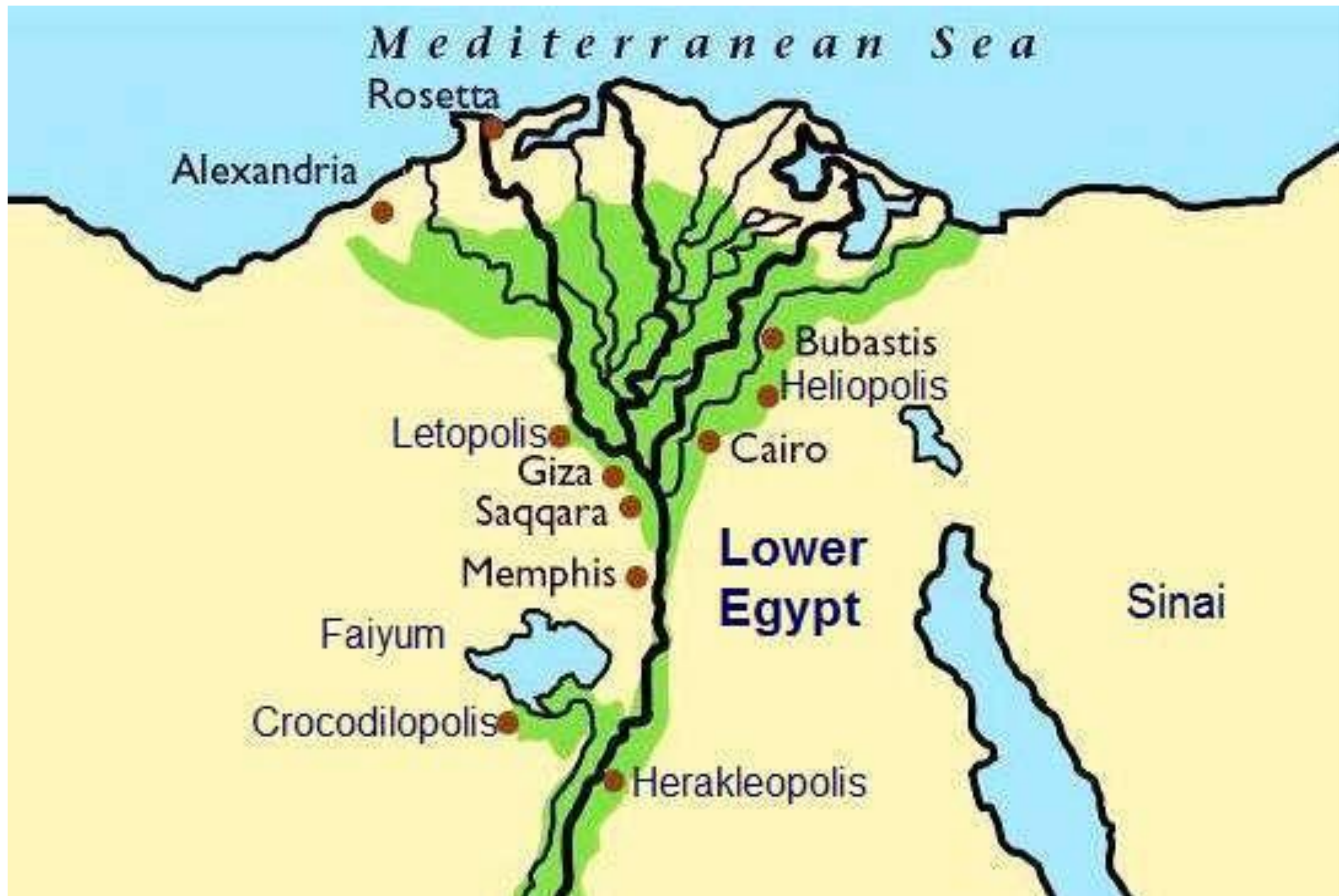
The Nile

- One of the longest rivers on earth – 6,853 km
- 2 streams: White Nile from Central Africa and Blue Nile from Ethiopia - merge near Khartoum (Sudan) and flow onto the Mediterranean
- Egypt named “Gift of the Nile” by **Herodotus (484 - 425 BCE)** due to:
 - Predictable annual floods carrying rich alluvial silt
 - Navigation-friendly, abundance of fish, geese etc.



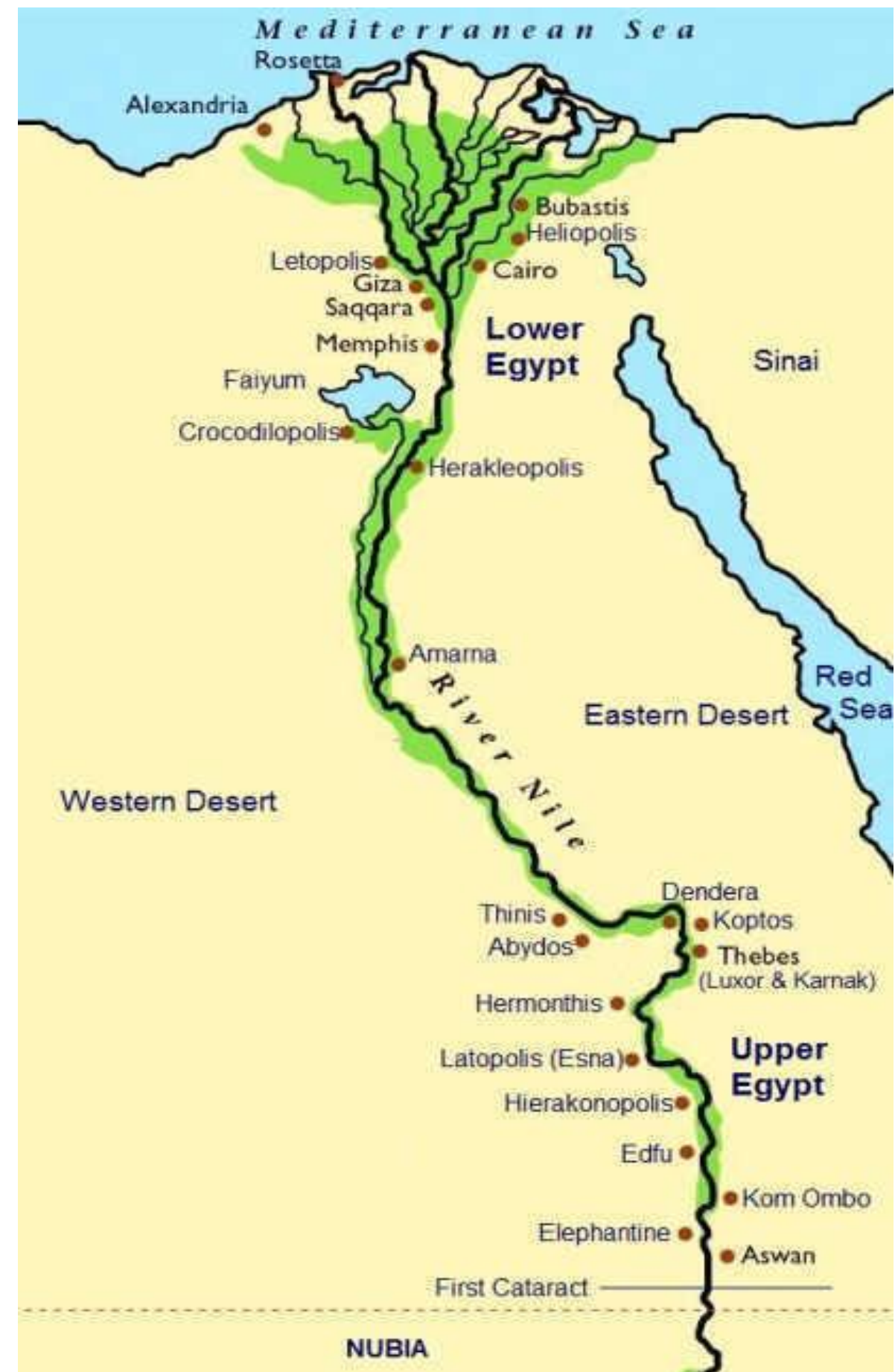
Geography and common culture

- Limited area of fertile soil (less than 12,000 sq. miles out of nearly 400,000 sq. miles) – forcing people to live in a compact society
- Surrounded by sea (Mediterranean), deserts and cataracts (waterfalls), Egyptians developed a common culture



Lower and Upper Egypt

- Traditional rivalry between fertile **Lower Egypt** (North) and arid **Upper Egypt** (South)
- Emergence of two kingdoms by 4000 BCE – in Lower and Upper Egypt
- Narmer (Menes) a king of Upper Egypt, united both parts around 3100 BCE
- Egyptian kings known as Pharaoh



Main periods

- Archaic Period (3100 – 2686 BCE)
- Old Kingdom (2686 – 2181 BCE)
- Middle Kingdom (2055 – 1650 BCE)
- New Kingdom (1550 – 1069 BCE)
- Late Period ((747 – 332 BCE)
- There were gaps or intermediate periods between the three Kingdoms

Ruled by 31 dynasties during 3 millennia (from 3100 to 332 BCE)

Archaic period (3100 – 2686 BCE)

- Narmer (Menes) founded the 1st Dynasty in c. 3100 BCE
- During the Archaic Period, canals were dug, cities and roads were built
- Centralized bureaucracy and a well-developed written language
- Initial burial monuments called *Mastaba* - later turned into gigantic **Pyramids**
- The purpose was to preserve and glorify the bodies of Pharaohs and their relatives

Mastaba- precursor to pyramid

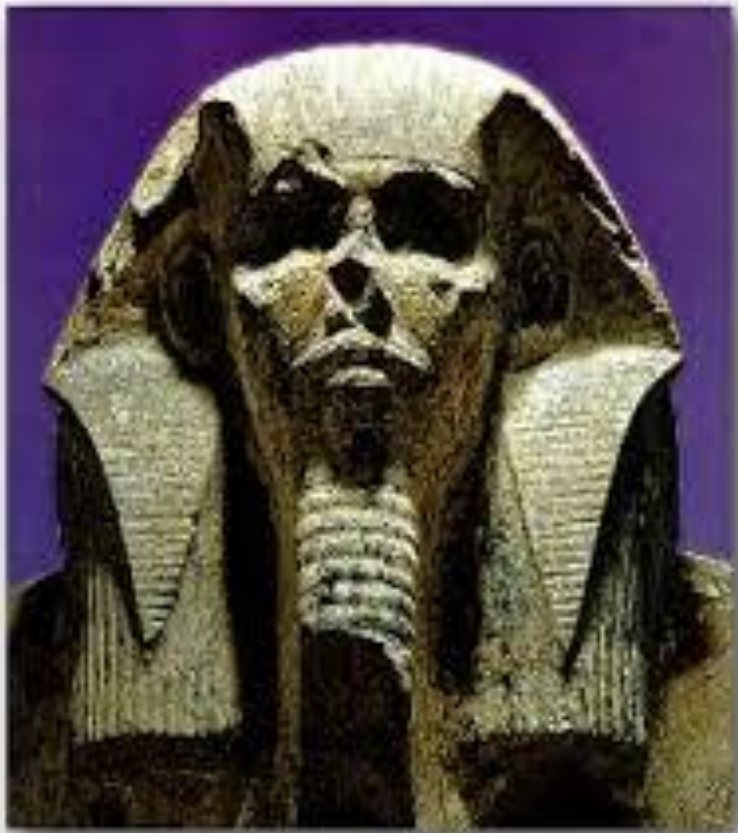


Old Kingdom (2686 – 2181 BCE)

- Absolute state power controlled by the Pharaoh, considered as representatives of Sun god
- Step pyramid built by Pharaoh *Djoser* - predecessor of gigantic pyramids of later days
- Pharaohs married sisters to keep the “divine blood” uncontaminated
- Pharaoh himself was the chief priest
- No standing army
- Considered the “Golden Age” of Egyptian civilization
- Collapse of Old Kingdom around 2181 BCE mainly due to climate change – economic crisis – social and political unrest

Step pyramid

Pharaoh Zoser



Collapse of the **Old Kingdom** around 2181 BCE
mainly due to: **climate change, economic crisis,**
social and political unrest

Middle Kingdom (2050-1650 BCE)

- Foundation of **Middle Kingdom** after a century-long power struggle and chaos
- Alliance with middle class - nobility kept in check
- Stability and prosperity for about 4 centuries
- Extensive drainage and irrigation projects
- Built more temples than pyramids
- Famous Pharaohs: Amenhotep I, Sesostris I & III, Amenhotep III

Pyramid

- About 80 ancient pyramids known so far
- Not just tombs – huge monuments meant to glorify the Pharaoh
- Three largest and best-preserved pyramids at Giza built at the beginning of the Old Kingdom



Pharaoh Khufu

- The most prominent one known as the ‘Great Pyramid’ (481 ft above ground) – built for pharaoh Khufu
- Over 20,000 workers – about 14 years

Great Pyramid of Giza (Pharaoh Khufu)



Luxor temple

Amenhotep III



Amenhotep IV (Akhenaten)



Picture taken by
M A Kawser at Louvre Museum,
Paris

Karnak temple



Study Questions

- What were the contrasts between Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilizations?
- Do you agree that ancient Egypt was the “gift of the Nile”?
- How did geographical factors facilitated the creation of a common Egyptian culture?
- How did the unification of Egypt take place?
- What were the achievements of the Archaic Period?
- Why is the Old Kingdom known as the “golden Age” in Egyptian history?
- Why did the Old Kingdom collapse?
- Why were pyramids built?



Thank You