



Egypt: Unification and Old Kingdom

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1.What were the contrasts between Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilization?

Ans: The contrasts between Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilization are given below:

	Mesopotamia	Egypt
1	Mesopotamia was stable.	Egypt is more stable compared to Mesopotamia.
2	Mesopotamia had a pleasant climate.	Egypt's climate is more pleasant.
3	Mesopotamia had mud-bricks available.	Egypt had metals & building stone available.
4	But the flooding caused by the river Tigris and Euphrates.	The flood of Nile was a regular thing in Egypt.
5	Mesopotamia had no natural barrier. It was an open plain land.	The natural barriers of Egypt were the desert, Mediterranean Sea, Nile Cataracts (waterfall).

2.Do you agree that ancient Egypt was the “Gift of the Nile”?

Ans: The Nile is the longest river on earth. It flows north 6853 km from the mountains of central Africa to the Mediterranean Sea. The last thousand kilometers is in Egypt. There the river cuts a narrow, green valley through the desert. Shortly before the Nile reaches the sea it branches to form a fan-shaped area of fertile land called a, “Delta”. Most ancient Egyptians lived in this delta area. The Nile has 2 streams: “White Nile” from Central Africa and “Blue Nile” from Ethiopia merge near Khartoum (Sudan) and flow onto the Mediterranean. The Egyptians had an advantage over the people of the other river valley civilizations. They knew that every year about the middle of July the Nile would overflow its banks. It also brought plenty of fish and geese along with it. By November the flood waters would go down. But the waters left behind large amounts of rich soil good for growing crops. The Egyptians learned to control the flood waters. To do this they build a system of dams and ditches to drain the extra water from the land. They also dug out basins or bowl shaped holes. They used these to hold and store the extra water. A machine called a shadoof lifted the water to the fields during the dry season the Egyptians dug irrigation canals. For a long time the Egyptians were protected from foreign invasions by the desert, the sea, and waterfalls called cataracts. Egypt was thus the “Gift of the Nile” and the entire basin was one of the world’s most self-contained geographical entities, as it is noted by the Greek historian and geographer Herodotus some 2500 years ago.

3.How did geographical factors facilitated the creation of a common Egyptian culture?

Ans: The Nile is the longest river on earth. It flows north 6853 km from the mountains of central Africa to the Mediterranean Sea. The last thousand kilometers is in Egypt. There the river cuts a narrow, green valley through the desert. Shortly before the Nile reaches the sea it branches to form a fan-shaped area of fertile land called a, “Delta”. Most ancient Egyptians lived in this delta area. Thus, limited area of fertile soil (less than 12000 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.

4.How did the unification of Egypt take place?

Ans: At first Egypt consisted of two kingdoms or states having kings as rulers. Egyptian kings known as Pharaoh. One was Upper Egypt. It lay in the south in the river valley. The other was Lower Egypt. It lay in the north in the delta. Around 3100 B.C. Narmer a king of Upper Egypt led his armies from the valley north into delta. He conquered Lower Egypt and married one of its princesses. Narmer united the two kingdoms into a single nation. He wore a double crown, the high white one of the south plus the shallow red one of the north. Narmer had many titles. He was called, “Lord of Upper and Lower Egypt”, “Wearer of Both Crowns” and “Lord of the Two Lands”. Narmer set up a new capital at Memphis a city on the border between Upper and Lower Egypt.

5.What were the achievements of the Archaic Period?

Ans: Narmer, as Menes founded the 1st Dynasty in c. 3100 BCE, is considered as initiator of the Archaic period, which lasted from 3100 BCE to 2686 BCE. At first Egypt consisted of two kingdoms or states having kings as rulers. Egyptian kings known as Pharaoh. One was Upper Egypt. It lay in the south in the river valley. The other was Lower Egypt. It lay in the north in the delta. Around 3100 B.C. Narmer a king of Upper Egypt led his armies from the valley north into delta. He conquered Lower Egypt and married one of its princesses. Narmer united the two kingdoms into a single nation.

During the Archaic Period canals were dug, cities and roads were built. Centralized administration and a well-developed language called Hieroglyphics developed in that period.

Initial burial monuments called Mastaba later turned into gigantic Pyramids. In ancient Egyptian, the term for a mastaba meant "**eternal house**", referring to the final resting place of the dead. The word mastaba derived from an Arabic word meaning "bench", and indeed, from far away, the structure does look like a bench. It had a flat roof and a rectangular shape with sloping sides facing outward. It was constructed with stone or bricks made of mud from the Nile. Mastabas were **tombs** and they began as burial sites for royals, including pharaohs, back in the earliest dynasties of ancient Egypt. As the Old Kingdom commenced, the pharaohs started to be buried in pyramids instead of mastabas.

6.Why is the old kingdom known as the “golden age” in Egyptian history?

Ans: Around 2700 B.C. a period known as the Old Kingdom started in Egypt. It lasted for about 650 years. During the Old Kingdom Egyptian cities became centers of religion and government. There lived kings, priests, government officials and craftspeople who worked for the temples or the government. The Fourth Dynasty of ancient Egypt is characterized as a "golden age" of the Old Kingdom. It was a time of peace and prosperity as well as one during which

trade with other countries is documented. It is often is described as the Age of the Pyramids too. The capital at that time was Memphis.

7. Why did the old kingdom collapse?

Ans: The old kingdom, which started at around 2700 B.C., lasted for about 650 years.

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During the 6th dynasty many ideas and aspects of the government changed. Kings were no longer seen as untouchable. The Biographical Text of Weni mentioned a plot to kill King Pepi I. Local officials became more powerful which decreased royal authority.

Pepi II was the most famous of this dynasty's kings. He was six when he inherited and he ruled for 94 years, the longest reign in Egypt's history. During the second half of Pepi II's reign, he was unable to rule well because the state collapsed. The people expected the pharaoh to provide food and safety for his people but he was unable to do this. Administrative offices became hereditary and this lead to a growth in their holders' power. Centralized government vanished as did the pharaoh's practical power.

The Old Kingdom thus collapsed around 2181 BCE mainly due to: climate change, economic crisis, social and political unrest.

8. Why were pyramids built?

Ans: Pyramids, which are considered one of the 7th wonder of human civilization in the world history, were often meant for a funerary cult to honor the pharaohs after their death.

Most pyramids were part of a large complex. The opening to the complex was at the pharaoh's valley temple, where offerings for the pharaoh's cult came in. There were also courtyards, buildings to store goods, housing for priests, boat pits and a cult pyramid.

The pyramids were designed to protect the pharaoh's bodies from floods, wild animals and robbers after they died. The Egyptians believed that the pharaohs would be happy after death if they had their personal belongings. Therefore they placed the pharaoh's clothing, weapons, furniture and jewelry in the pyramids. The Egyptians tried to protect the pharaoh's body because they believed that the soul could not survive without the body. It was important for a pharaoh's soul to live after death. In that way the pharaoh would continue to take care of Egypt and its people.

The Egyptians built all their pyramids on the West bank of the Nile. Scholars have found around 80 pyramids in Egypt and more are likely buried under the sand. The most important pyramid complexes are at Saqqara, Meidum, Dahshur and Giza. Some pyramids are only mud-brick remnants now.

The Step Pyramid of Djoser at Saqqara was the first pyramid. It was originally a large mastaba, a square flat-topped mound. Five more mastabas, each smaller than the previous one, was built on top of the bottom layer. The result was the first step pyramid, and it was 204 feet high

The Great Pyramid of Giza (also known as the Pyramid of Khufu or the Pyramid of Cheops) is the oldest and largest of the three pyramids in the Giza pyramid complex bordering what is now El Giza, Egypt. It is the oldest of the

Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, and the only one to remain largely intact. It was built by Pharaoh Khufu. His burial chamber was in the center of the pyramid rather than underneath the pyramid. Egyptologists discovered two boat burials beside the pyramid and restored one of them. Khufu built three pyramids for his queens on the plateau beside his tomb.

Some other important relevant questions:

1) How the pyramids were build?

Ans: The first pyramid built in Egypt was the Step Pyramid of Djoser, during his reign in the Third Dynasty. This pyramid was built by Imhotep, one of the earliest known architects and engineers. The step pyramid was the first monumental stone building constructed in Egypt.

The pharaohs and their viziers chose good sites for the pyramid. The engineers oriented the plans to the cardinal points and laid out the base's outline. After they leveled out the site, except for a small mound in the center, they laid a layer of limestone or granite over the bedrock.

The builders leveled the stone layer, and they were very accurate. At Giza, workers built a quarry for limestone, with a ramp leading to the base of the pyramid. They dragged stone blocks on sledges over the ramp.

As the pyramid rose, workers built the ramp higher and wrapped it around the pyramid. After completing the construction, carvers smoothed the casing blocks to create a smooth surface. The workers then disassembled the ramp as they smoothed the outer blocks, working from the top down.

Scholars have exhumed a cemetery for pyramid workers at Giza. The tombs helped them understand how the administrative organization of the builders worked. Administrators divided workers into crews that had names and overseers regulated every aspect of the building.