

Defending Egypt

During the Old Kingdom, the ancient Egyptians believed that the pharaoh was really a god in human form. As such, people thought that the pharaoh was responsible for Egypt's good fortune and protection. He and his priests had to perform elaborate rituals every day to ensure that the sun would rise, the Nile would flood, and crops would grow. For his role in keeping Egypt safe and secure, people honored the pharaoh. In addition, Egyptians felt confident that their geography would keep them safe. Because Egypt was surrounded by deserts and seas, they felt well-guarded from invasion.

However, after the collapse of the Old Kingdom around 2100 BCE, the Pharaohs never regained the power and importance they once had as gods. During the Middle Kingdom, which arose around 2055 BCE, strong pharaohs realized they would have to do more to bring stability to Egypt. They achieved this through increasing trade, which brought economic growth. From their capital at Thebes, Middle Kingdom pharaohs encouraged sailors and merchants to import goods from surrounding lands. Historians have found evidence that Egyptians of the Middle Kingdom traded with the Nubians, who lived south of Egypt, the Phoenicians, the Minoans of Greece, and other peoples.

However, the Middle Kingdom fell around 1650 BCE to invaders from the Levant called the **Hyksos**, who ruled for about 100 years. Eventually, Egyptians rose up against the Hyksos, drove them out of Egypt, and regained control, starting the New Kingdom.

Years of Hyksos rule had showed the Egyptians that they needed a new strategy for their defense. The desert and the sea would no longer keep invaders out of Egypt. As a result, pharaohs had to find a new way to secure Egypt's borders and keep the kingdom safe.

New Kingdom pharaohs decided that the best way to protect Egypt from further invasions was to build a powerful military. To this end, they created Egypt's first permanent army. In addition to traditional foot soldiers, the Egyptian army included archers and charioteers equipped with weapons adopted from the Hyksos. Chariots are fast horse-drawn carriages used in battle.

To prevent a foreign people from taking over Egypt again, pharaohs decided to create an empire of their own. If Egypt ruled lands beyond the Nile Valley, they thought, then these lands would serve as a buffer between their kingdom and others. As part of their empire building, the pharaohs headed south into Nubia, which they had lost during the period of Hyksos rule. In Nubia, they conquered the kingdom of Kush and forced its rulers to pay tribute to Egypt.

Even as their armies were invading Nubia, the pharaohs led campaigns east into Asia. They attacked and took over almost the entire Sinai Peninsula and parts of Phoenicia and Syria. As the map to the left shows, the Egyptians formed an empire that reached from southern Nubia all the way to the Euphrates.

World History: Human Legacy, Susan Elizabeth Ramírez et al., Holt

