

SOME ANCIENT EGYPTIAN FIRSTS

1. **First Pharaoh of Unified Upper and Lower Egypt depicted as wearing the Red and White Crowns** - King Menes, possibly also known as Scorpion, Narmer, Aha and/or Boleful Catfish (as he is known on the Narmer Palette, a commemorative cosmetic-grinding palette that is at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo), who unified Upper (northern or delta) and Lower (southern or desert) Egypt. He is depicted wearing the red (northern) and white (southern) crowns. Rather than wearing them separately, later pharaohs wore a combined crown having the southern white bowling pin shape sticking up out of the center of the red northern crown. See also "First Capital" below.

2. **First Woman Pharaoh** - Some experts believe that **Meryt-Neith** (1st Dynasty about 3000 BCE) ruled Egypt at the start of the dynastic period, possibly as the third ruler of the First Dynasty. She is known principally for her funerary monuments. Her reign lasted less than three years. Her name means 'Beloved of the Goddess Neith' and she has a funerary monument and solar boat at Saqqara. This boat would enable her spirit to travel to the Afterlife, an honor reserved only for a king. She also has another tomb at Abydos. Both these tombs are surrounded by over fifty graves of attendants and servants, demonstrating that she was buried with the power of a king and with full honors of a powerful ruler. Other women pharaohs included **Hatshepsut** (1473-1458 BCE - XVIII Dynasty) and **Cleopatra VII** (51-30 BCE, she was the last of the Ptolemaic Pharaohs and the last woman to be a pharaoh albeit a Greek one. Note: the numbering of Dynasties ended with the second invasion of Egypt by the Persians (first invasion was in 525 BCE; but the Egyptians temporarily regained control from Persia from 404 BCE-343 BCE (Dynasties XXVIII-XXX), ending with **Nectanebo II**, the last Pharaoh of the XXX Dynasty being defeated by Ataxerxes. After Alexander the Great defeated the Persian XXXI Dynasty under Darius III in 332 BCE, the Ptolemaic pharaohs became the rulers of Egypt. That era, which lasted until 30 BCE when Cleopatra and Mark Antony were defeated by the Romans at Actium, was simply referred to as that of the Ptolemaic Dynasty).

3. **First Pharaoh known to be buried in Valley of the Kings (Luxor)** - Thutmose I (1504-1492 BCE) of the XVIII Dynasty.

4. **First Queen to be buried in Valley of the Queens (Luxor)** Sitre, the principal wife (or "Queen") of **Ramesses I** (1320-1318 BCE; he was the father of **Seti I** [1318-1304 BCE] and grandfather of **Ramesses II** [1279-1213 BCE], all of whom were XIX Dynasty pharaohs).

5. **First:** (a) **Step Pyramid** - The first pyramid, with "steps of diminishing size", was built at Saqqara by Imhotep for **Djoser** (2668-2649 BCE) in the III Dynasty.

(b) **Smooth-sided Pyramid** - The First "real" pyramid, being one with smoothed triangular, as opposed to stepped, sides, was the "red" pyramid built at Dashur by **Snefru** (2575-2551 BCE), a IV Dynasty pharaoh; he also built the "collapsed" pyramid at Meidum in the Fayum and an additional pyramid at Dashur - the Bent Pyramid. The three great Giza Pyramids also were built in the IV Dynasty, with the Great Pyramid being built by **Snefru's** son, **Khufu** (aka Cheops) (2551-2528 BCE). The other two were built by his grandson **Khafre** (aka Chephren) (2520-2494 BCE) and his great grandson **Menkaure** (aka Mycerinus) (2490-2472 BCE).

6. **First Archaeologist** - Khaemwaset, who was a son of Ramesses II and the High Priest of Memphis, is sometimes referred to as the first archaeologist. He was concerned that the people who built the pyramids would be forgotten (note that by the time of Ramesses II, the Great Pyramid at Giza was approximately 1300 years old), so he restored and added hieroglyphic labels on many sites, an example being the Pyramid of Unas in Saqqara.

7. **First canal between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea** - **Necho II** (620-595 BCE) of the XXVI (Saite) Dynasty. Herodotus, the fifth century CE historian, claimed that 120,000 workers had died before an oracle said that the canal would only benefit Egypt's enemies. Darius, the Great King of Persia completed it around 500 BCE by linking the Red Sea to the Great Bitter Lake in the Delta, which then connected to Bubastis on the Nile and the Mediterranean via an older waterway built by **Ramesses II** (1279-1213 BCE-XIX Dynasty). The canal was refined and restored by the Ptolemies and then re-opened by the Roman Emperor, Trajan in 98-117 CE and later was used by Amr to ship grain to Arabia after the

Moslem conquest until it was deliberately abandoned in the VIII century to starve out rebels in Medina. Work on the current Suez Canal began in 1859 and was completed in 1879.

8. First circumnavigation of Africa. Necho II (620-595 BCE) of the XXVI (Saite) Dynasty is said to have hired Phoenician ships to circumnavigate Africa, the first recorded instance of this being accomplished. Western History reports that Vasco de Gamba was the first Westerner to circumnavigate Africa in 1497-98. In Egypt of the Ptolemaic period, Eratosthenes (276-194 BCE) was the first to measure with rough accuracy the size of the sphere of the earth.

9. First Cataract - At Aswan is the first of six cataracts on the Nile River through Khartoum in the Sudan. A cataract is a set of rapids that are difficult to navigate.

10 First Monotheist - Akhenaten of the XVIII Dynasty, known prior to his embrace of the sun disk (the "Aten," a manifestation of the sun god) as Amenhotep IV. During the Amarna period (the last part of the reign of Akhenaten in the XVIII Dynasty), the battle with the priests of Amun over the pharaoh's preferred worship of the Aten escalated to the point that Akhenaten moved the capital to Amarna which was halfway between Memphis (across the Nile from Cairo) and Thebes, and banned the worship of all gods but the Aten. Workmen were sent around to chisel out the names of the gods from all monuments (including where it was part of a person's name like that of his father "Amen"hotep III). This ban made Akhenaten the first recorded monotheist. Some who have studied the situation identify Akhenaten with Moses (including, famously, Sigmund Freud in his *Moses and Monotheism*).

11. First Pharaoh in length of Reign - Pepi II (2566-2476 BCE) of the VI Dynasty is reported to have ruled for 90 years, thus beating Ramesses II who ruled for 67 years.

12. First reference to Israel - The first known mention of Israel anywhere is on the "Israel Stele" (this can be seen in the Cairo Museum at the north end of the Atrium on the Ground floor). **Merneptah** (1236-1213 BCE - XIX Dynasty), thirteenth son, and successor, to **Ramesses II**, used the back of an old stele to report victories in Palestine, and says that he destroyed the seed of Israel, wiping them out. Note: the front of the stele had previously been carved for **Amenhotep III** (1417-1379 BCE) and was restored by **Seti I** after defacement by the Atenists under **Akhenaten**, the son of **Amenhotep III**.

13. First Burial Site of Alexander the Great - Alexander the Great, who died in Egypt in 329 BCE, probably was first buried near the Sages, a semicircle of Ptolemaic period statues of Greek philosophers found on the route to the Serapeum. Adjacent to the Serapeum was a Temple of **Nectanebo II** (360-343 BCE - XXX Dynasty). Recent analyses suggests that **Alexander the Great** was buried in **Nectanebo II's** empty coffin (**Nectanebo II** was defeated by the Persian King, Ataxerxes, and fled to Nubia, thus never buried there) while Alexander's final tomb was being constructed in Alexandria. Supporting these analyses is that one of the statues (next to the right end and leaning on a statue of Serapis) depicts Demetrios of Phaleron. This would seem to date the sages to the reign of **Ptolemy I** (332- BCE-Dynasty) and the time of his initial burial of Alexander the Great in the area since Demetrios supported a rival to **Ptolemy II Philadelphus**, the successor to Ptolemy I and thus, would have been unlikely to be honored thereafter with a statue in the reign of **Ptolemy II Philadelphus** or his descendents. Also, the sarcophagus of **Nectanebo II** (now in the British Museum) was found in Alexandria where it presumably would have been used to transport Alexander to his final resting place (Alexandria was founded by **Alexander the Great** and did not exist at the time of Nectanebo II).

14. First Capital of Egypt. Thinis (or This) near Abydos is considered to be the first capital after **Narmer** unified Egypt in approximately 3100 BCE. The capital was moved to Memphis (which Narmer founded) during the II Dynasty. During the VII-VIII Dynasties, a rival capital arose at Hierakonpolis near Beni Seuf and, later, in the X-XI Dynasties, Thebes which had been rising as a cultural area in Upper Egypt, became the capital. Memphis ultimately disappeared around 700 CE in conjunction with the Arab invasion of Egypt.

15 First use of the word "Cartouche" in Egyptology - Napoleon's soldiers suggested that the oval in which a pharaoh's name is enclosed looked like a gun cartridge ("cartouche" in French). The name has stuck.