The Kingdoms of Egypt

During the 3000s B.C., two kingdoms developed in Egypt. The kings of Upper Egypt wore white crowns. The kings of Lower Egypt wore red crowns.

Uniting Egypt Legends say that Narmer united the two kingdoms in about 3000 B.C. This made him the first **pharaoh,** or king, of a united Egypt. He wore a double crown of red and white and founded Egypt's earliest dynasty. A **dynasty** is a ruling family.
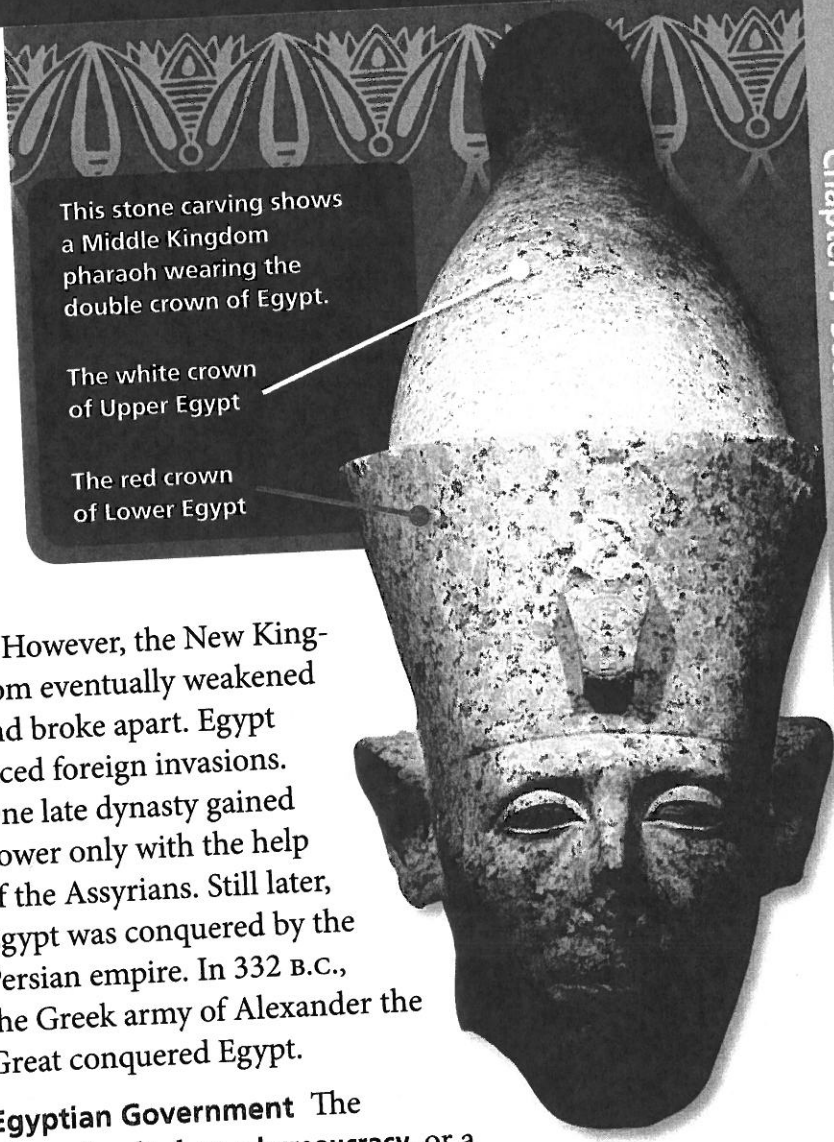
Normally, control passed between members of a dynasty. Sometimes, however, a new dynasty gained power. Historians divide Egypt's history into periods based on kingdoms and dynasties.

The Old and Middle Kingdoms

Historians call the period from about 2686 B.C. to 2125 B.C. the Old Kingdom. Like later kingdoms, the Old Kingdom was a period of prosperity, political strength, and cultural achievement.

After a period of civil wars, the Middle Kingdom began. It lasted from about 2055 B.C. to 1650 B.C. Pharaohs of the Middle Kingdom dealt with one of Egypt's major <u>environmental</u> challenges—the Nile floods. They built a system of canals that could drain dangerous flood waters and irrigate new farmland.

High Point and Decline The New Kingdom followed more civil wars and invasions. The New Kingdom lasted from about 1550 B.C. to 1070 B.C. New Kingdom pharaohs conquered lands in Asia and Africa. This was the high point of ancient Egyptian power and prosperity.

This stone carving shows a Middle Kingdom pharaoh wearing the double crown of Egypt.

The white crown of Upper Egypt

The red crown of Lower Egypt

However, the New Kingdom eventually weakened and broke apart. Egypt faced foreign invasions. One late dynasty gained power only with the help of the Assyrians. Still later, Egypt was conquered by the Persian empire. In 332 B.C., the Greek army of Alexander the Great conquered Egypt.

Egyptian Government The pharaoh relied on a **bureaucracy,** or a system of offices and officials that handle the business of government. The head of Egypt's bureaucracy was an official called the vizier. The bureaucracy collected taxes from farmers. Farmers paid these taxes mainly in the form of surplus crops.

The bureaucracy took some of this surplus for itself. It distributed the rest to priests, to the pharaoh, and to artisans and merchants who worked for the pharaoh. Egypt's bureaucracy and system of taxation were a model for later governments, including those of today.

Reading Check Which of Egypt's kingdoms was the most powerful?

environmental, *adj.,* having to do with natural surroundings

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