

Notes on Quiz #2: Egyptian Empires

1. For what reasons did the Old Kingdom pharaohs build pyramids? How did ziggurats have similar functions?

The pyramids were visible symbols of the pharaoh's divine rule, unifying the people's shared identity and religion. They represented power unlike any human's and so reinforced the pharaoh's divinity. Pyramids were also the ultimate in prestige and luxury, which was controlled by the pharaohs, and so showed precedence over all classes and over past kings as well. They employed huge numbers of people, impressing the people directly with his power and keeping them busy between harvests. They served as temples for the worship of pharaohs after death.

Like all monumental building (e.g., the ziggurats) they displayed Egypt's (and so the pharaoh's) immense economic power—to its own people and to outsiders as well, as well as serving as a visual focal point for a strong central identity as Egyptians and a home to a protective patron deity, in this case the pharaoh as a manifestation of Horus.

2. Who was Akhenaten? What do you think his story tells us about New Kingdom Egypt?

Akhenaten was an Egyptian pharaoh of the New Kingdom (during the 18th Dynasty). He and his queen, Nefertiti, sought to bring about religious reform in Egypt by shifting the focus of worship to Aten, calling him more important than the other gods. This brought about a form of polytheism in which one god is greatly predominant called henotheism. Akhenaten pushed the exclusive worship of Aten by changing his regnal name from Amunhotep IV to Akhenaten, building a new royal city sacred to Aten, and instituting new rituals and priesthoods.

In so doing, Akhenaten sought to undo the shift in religious power from the pharaohs, who had held unquestionable religious authority in the Old Kingdom, to the priests, who now held much greater power in the New Kingdom. The priests emphasized the significance of Amun-Ra, the sun god, in the pharaoh's rule, so by associating the kingship with Aten he sought to wrest power from the priests. It was too late for that, however: the authority of the priests was now too well established, and the pharaoh's power too diminished from the absolute in the New Kingdom. Egyptian religion reverted the control of the priests after the deaths of Akhenaten and Nefertiti, as signified by the regnal name of his son and eventual successor, Tutankhamun.

3. For today you read "The Death of Enkidu." What are his reactions to his approaching death?

Enkidu is distraught at first that his death will not be meaningful—that he will waste away rather than while achieving something great for Uruk and leaving a legacy by which he overcomes death. In his grief he blames Shamhat for civilizing him, but later repents and praises her for the gift she gave him.

The House of Dust is the term used to refer to the Sumerian afterlife; the name underlines that it is what is left after the ending of life, and not a place where life continues. In his dream, Enkidu sees (among other things) past kings who were powerful and constructive during their lives, but impotent and pathetic, bemoaning the loss of their ability to achieve.

EC1. All of the following are true of the Semitic invaders who dominated Egypt between the Middle and New Kingdoms EXCEPT:

- (a) The Egyptians called them the Hyksos, meaning "foreign rulers"
- ✓ (b) They ruled peacefully over Egypt for many thousands of years
- (c) They enthusiastically embraced and preserved Egyptian culture
- (d) They fought using horses and chariots, bronze weapons, and composite bows

EC2. In your opinion, why do you think unification was achievable in Egypt, but impossible in Sumer?

The main point here is that the city-states of Sumer were in competition for limited resources, and so remained in rivalry with each other and were often hostile. In Egypt, however, the environment provided plenty for all, so there was no need to compete for resources, and everyone had in common the protection and nurturing of the gods—eventually manifested as a single god-king.