

## Pharaoh



Figure 1: The head of the alabaster sphinx is a portrait of an unknown pharaoh.

Originally, the word pharaoh referenced the royal palace in ancient Egypt. The word came to be used as a synonym for the Egyptian king under the New Kingdom (starting in the 18th dynasty, 1539–1292 B.C.), and by the 22nd dynasty (c. 945–c. 730 B.C.) it had been adopted as an epithet of respect. The term has since evolved into a generic name for all ancient Egyptian kings, although it was never formally the king's title. In official documents, the full title of the Egyptian king consisted of five names, each preceded by one of the following titles: Horus, Two Ladies, Golden Horus, King of Upper and Lower Egypt, and Son of Re. The last name was given to him at birth, the others at coronation.

The Egyptians believed their pharaoh to be the mediator between the gods and the world of men. After death the pharaoh became divine, identified with Osiris, the father of Horus and god of the dead, and passed on his sacred powers and position to the new pharaoh, his son. The pharaoh's divine status was portrayed in allegorical terms: his uraeus (the snake on his crown) spat flames at his enemies; he was able to trample thousands of the enemy on the battlefield; and he was all-powerful, knowing everything and controlling nature and fertility.

As a divine ruler, the pharaoh was the preserver of the god-given order, called *maat*. He owned a large portion of Egypt's land and directed its use, was responsible for his people's economic and spiritual welfare, and dispensed justice to his subjects. His will was supreme, and he governed by royal decree. To govern fairly, though, the pharaoh had to delegate responsibility; his chief assistant was the vizier, who, among other duties, was chief justice, head of the treasury, and overseer of all records. Below this central authority, the royal will of the pharaoh was administered through the nomes, or provinces, into which Upper and Lower Egypt were divided.

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