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A Brief History of the Egyptian 18th Dynasty
The New Kingdom & The Amarna Period

HIS-301 – Ancient Empires
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The Pyramids at Giza were ancient history to the people of upper, middle, and lower Egypt by more than one-thousand years when the pharaohs of the Eighteenth Dynasty overthrew their foreign invaders and restored their empire to a new place in near eastern history by making what was once old, new again. This period of Egyptian history is often called the “Era of World Power” and empire was its future.¹

The Eighteenth Dynasty began ca. 1580 BC with a reign of a pharaoh in a long line of pharaonic rulers, Ahmose whom consolidates and expands power by overthrowing the Hyksos rulers from lower Egypt and unites Upper and Lower Egypt. Coincidentally it was the Hyksos whom had brought horses and chariots to Egypt. His successor expands the empire to the Euphrates and to the fourth cataract on the Nile with political, social, cultural and economical implications. Subsequent pharaohs expand the religious center at Thebes with enormous pylons and a Great Hypostyle Hall.² This era would see a female Pharaoh, Hatshepsut assume co-regency with her step-son nephew Tuthmosis III, and in short order proclaim and manifest herself as a male pharaoh with full dress and false beard as depicted in a partial bust found by the Metropolitan Museum of Art expeditions in 1926 and 1927 at Deir el-Bahri.³ Inscriptions from her mortuary temple inform us of an expedition to the mysterious “Land of Punt” whereas a booty ship brought back apes, incense trees, ivory, gold, timber, leopard skins, baboons and dwarfs.⁴ This signifies the new empires expansive reach into unknown lands.

It would be the reign of Tuthmosis III, successor to his step-mother Hatshepsut who would become one of the most successful and famous pharaohs of Egypt. Battles with foreign enemies such as the Mitanni at Kadesh extends the trading empire to the “islands of the great circle” (Crete, Cyprus,

¹ Peter P. Reisterer, *Egyptian Museum Cairo*. (Cairo: Lehnert & Landrock, 1995), 11.

² A.C. Capiceci, *Art and History of Egypt*. (Florence: Casa Editrice Bonechi, 1994), 10-11.

³ Alberto Silioti, *Egypt: Temples, Men and Gods*. (Luxor: A.A. Gaddis & Sons, 1996), 249.

⁴ Reisterer, 13.

Cyclades).⁵ During the Eighteenth Dynasty the utilization of political power in the form of the marrying daughters to foreign rulers and princes to insure peace and stability became a common occurrence. Clashes with the Hittites began in this period, but the most striking and challenging change to Near Eastern history was about to occur with the rule of Amenhotep IV who later takes the name Akhenaten.

Akhenaten was a heretic pharaoh who was not only the benefactor of a restored empire but recreated his empire in a new form with a monotheistic religion and created new forms of architecture, art, and a new capital city at Tell el-Amarna.⁶ This revolution and new religion worshipping the Aten (sun god) was probably rejected by the old religions temple priests and not completely understood by the masses. This new monotheistic religion would end shortly after Akhenaten's death by a boy king, we all know as Tutankhamen. He would restore the old religion and be entombed with the riches of a empire for archeologist Howard Carter almost three-thousand years later to "see wonderful things" on November 26, 1922. After the premature death of Tutankhamen, Akhasunamen-Nefertiti (Tutankhamen's wife) marries the commoner general Ay and rules for four years. At this time the expansion and maintenance of the empire was taking its toll when another commoner and general, Horemheb gains power, destroys traces of the heretic pharaoh Akhenaten, signs a peace treaty with the Hittites, and stops administrative corruption.⁷

While the history of ancient Egypt would continue for another twelve hundred years and include domestic and foreign rulers. The next dynasty would embrace the longest reigning and master builder pharaoh Rameses II, but for the people and pharaohs of the short-lived Eighteenth Dynasty the empire of the New Kingdom had ended and its splendor and tumultuous history would be debated by generations of philosophers, historians and archaeologists and continues to the present day.

⁵ Capiceci, 10.

⁶ Nicholas Reeves, *Akhenaten: Egypt's False Prophet*. (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2005), 75-112.

⁷ Capiceci, 11.

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