The leaders during the golden age of Egypt expanded the empire through war and trade. Although Egypt later declined, it greatly influenced other civilizations.

A Golden Age

Why was the Middle Kingdom a "golden age" for Egypt?

Around 2200 B.C., the ruling pharaohs in Memphis began to weaken. Ambitious nobles fought for control of Egypt. For more than 200 years, disorder and violence swept through the region. Finally, a new dynasty of pharaohs came to power. They moved the capital south to a city called Thebes (THEEBZ). These new pharaohs began a period of peace and order called the Middle Kingdom that lasted from about c. 2055 B.C. to c. 1650 B.C.

Conquests

During the Middle Kingdom, Egypt conquered new territories. Egyptian armies gained control of Nubia to the south and expanded northeast into present-day Syria. The Egyptian pharaohs added to their kingdom's wealth. They required tribute, or forced payments, from the peoples their armies had conquered.

Within Egypt, the pharaohs made many improvements. They added thousands of acres to the land already being farmed to increase crop production. They had more irrigation dams and channels built to supply more water to the population. The pharaohs also ordered the construction of a canal between the Nile River and the Red Sea. As a result, Egyptian traders were able to send goods south by ship through the Red Sea. From there, the ships sailed to ports along the coasts of Arabia and East Africa.

The Arts Flourish

Egyptian arts and architecture thrived during the Middle Kingdom. Painters decorated the walls of tombs and temples with colorful scenes. These tomb paintings illustrated stories about the deities, as well as scenes from everyday life. Sculptors carved hunting, fishing, and battle scenes on large stone walls. They created statues of the pharaohs, showing them as ordinary humans rather than gods.

During the Middle Kingdom, the Egyptians developed a new kind of architecture. Pharaohs no longer had pyramids built. Instead, they had their tombs cut into limestone cliffs west of the Nile River. This area became known as the Valley of the Kings.

The Hyksos

During the 1600s B.C., some Egyptian nobles challenged the power of the pharaohs. Civil war divided Egypt, ending an era of peace and prosperity. As the Middle Kingdom weakened, outsiders invaded Egypt. A people from western Asia known as the Hyksos (HIHK • sahs) swept across the desert into Egypt.

The Hyksos were powerful warriors who used methods of warfare unknown to the Egyptians. The Hyksos rode in horse-drawn chariots and fought with sturdy weapons made of bronze and iron. As a result, they overwhelmed the Egyptian soldiers and took control of the land.

For more than 100 years, Hyksos kings ruled Egypt. The Hyksos borrowed some Egyptian customs but remained separate from the Egyptian people. Meanwhile, most Egyptians hated the Hyksos and planned to overthrow them. The Egyptians learned how to steer horse-drawn chariots and use Hyksos weapons. Around 1550 B.C., an Egyptian prince named Ahmose (AH • mohs) formed an army and drove the Hyksos out of Egypt.

Analyzing How were the Egyptians able to defeat the Hyksos?

Building an Empire

Why was the New Kingdom a unique period in ancient Egypt's history?

Ahmose founded a new dynasty. It began a period known as the New Kingdom, which lasted from about 1550 B.C. to 1070 B.C. During this time, Egypt prospered through trade, gained more lands through conquest, and reached the height of its power. No
longer isolated, Egyptians benefited from the spread of goods, ideas, and cultures within their empire.

**A Woman Pharaoh**

A queen named Hatshepsut (hat • SHEHP • soot) was one of the few women to rule Egypt. She came to power in about 1473 B.C. and governed with her husband. Then, after his death, she made herself pharaoh and ruled on behalf of her young nephew.

Because the title of pharaoh was usually passed from father to son, Hatshepsut had to prove that she was a good leader. In order for the people to accept her, Hatshepsut dressed in the clothes of a male pharaoh. She even wore the false beard to copy the one worn by male Egyptian kings. She built magnificent temples and restored old monuments. Her tomb in the Valley of the Kings contains large wall carvings that illustrate some of the major events of her reign.

**Connections to TODAY**

**Ivory**

Ivory comes from mammals with tusks, such as elephants and walruses.

**Growth of Trade**

Hatshepsut was more interested in promoting trade than starting wars. She made great efforts to restore trade relations that had been interrupted by the Hyksos invasion.

During the rule of Hatshepsut, Egyptian seafarers sailed to ports in Arabia and East Africa. There, Egyptian traders exchanged beads, metal tools, and weapons for gold, ivory, ebony wood, and incense (IN • sens), a material burned for its pleasant smell.

The Egyptians valued wood products because the Nile River valley had few trees. They needed wood to build boats, furniture, and other items. To find wood, Egyptian traders traveled to the east coast of the Mediterranean Sea where the present-day country of Lebanon is located. The people in this region were called the Phoenicians (fih • NEE • shuns). The Phoenicians had a great impact on other cultures in the region. Their invention of an alphabet and a system of writing influenced others. Phoenician trade routes and settlements also encouraged the spread of goods and ideas across a large part of the ancient world.

**Trade and Politics**

The Egyptians traded wheat, paper, gold, copper, tin and tools to the Phoenicians for purple dye, wood and furniture. The traders exchanged goods they had for supplies they needed, rather than selling goods for money. The Phoenicians in turn traded Egyptian goods to other people. By trading with the Phoenicians, Egyptians spread their food and goods across Southwest Asia. Trade in the eastern Mediterranean helped make the Egyptian kingdom wealthier. Hatshepsut used some of this wealth to build monuments.

In addition to trade, New Kingdom pharaohs developed political ties between Egypt and nearby kingdoms. For example, the Egyptian dynasty became joined by treaty or marriage with ruling families in the Babylonian Empire in Mesopotamia, the Mittani (mih • TAH • nee) in Syria, and the Hittite Empire in Anatolia (ah • huh • TOH • lee • uh).

To maintain close ties, pharaohs and the other rulers also exchanged envoys (EHN • voyz), or representatives. These actions marked the first time in history that a group of nations tried working together to reach common goals.

**Expanding the Empire**

When Hatshepsut died, her nephew, Thutmose III (thoot • MOH • suh), became pharaoh. Thutmose was a strong leader and general who expanded Egypt's control north to the Euphrates River in Mesopotamia. His troops also moved south far up the Nile and conquered Nubia, which had once thrown off Egyptian rule. Egyptian armies captured nearly 350 cities during Thutmose's reign.

As Thutmose and his armies conquered more areas, the Egyptian empire grew wealthy, and slavery became more common. Egypt acquired gold, copper, ivory and other valuable goods from conquered peoples. Egyptians captured and enslaved many prisoners of war. Enslaved people had some rights, however, including the right to own land, marry, and eventually gain their freedom.

**Explaining** Why did the Egyptians want to trade with the Phoenicians?

**Two Unusual Pharaohs**
How did two unusual pharaohs change ancient Egypt?

During the New Kingdom, two remarkable pharaohs came to power. One pharaoh, Amenhotep IV, tried to make dramatic changes, and one, Tutankhamen, was very young. Their actions set them apart from other rulers in Egypt's long history.

A Religious Founder

A new pharaoh named Amenhotep IV (ah • muhn • HOH • tehp) came to power in about 1370 B.C. Supported by his wife, Nefertiti (nehf • uhr • TEE • tee), Amenhotep tried to change Egypt's religion, which was based on the worship of many deities.

Amenhotep believed that Egypt's priests had grown too powerful and wealthy. He felt threatened by their power. To lessen the priests' authority, Amenhotep started a new religion. He introduced the worship of Aton (AHT • n ), the sun god, as Egypt's only god. When Egypt's priests opposed this change, Amenhotep removed many of them from their posts, took their lands, and closed temples. He then changed his name to Akhenaton (ahk • NAH • tuhn), meaning "Spirit of Aton." The capital was moved to a new city north of Thebes called Akhetaton (ahk • heh • TAH • tuhn).

These changes unsettled Egypt. Most Egyptians rejected Aton and continued to worship many deities. In addition, the priests of the old religion resisted their loss of power. The discontent with Akhenaton's rule spread to the army leaders. They believed Akhenaton, devoted to his new religion, neglected his duties as pharaoh. Under Akhenaton's weak rule, Egypt lost most of its lands in western Asia to outside invaders.

Who Was "King Tut"?

When Akhenaton died about 1360 B.C., his son, 10-year-old Tutankhamen (too • tang • KAH • muhn), became pharaoh. The young pharaoh relied on advice from priests and officials to rule Egypt. Tutankhamen quickly restored the worship of many deities. Tutankhamen's short rule ended after only nine years when he died unexpectedly. The cause of his death is still a mystery to historians and he remains a fascinating figure.

Even though "King Tut," played a small role in the history of Egypt, he is the most famous of the pharaohs. British archaeologist Howard Carter attracted public attention when he discovered Tut's tomb in 1922. Carter's find was amazing because most tombs of the pharaohs had been robbed by thieves. Tut's tomb, however, contained the pharaoh's mummy and many treasures, including a brilliant gold mask of the young ruler's face.

Evaluating Why are Akhenaton and Tutankhamen considered unusual pharaohs?

Recovery and Decline

Why did the Egyptian empire decline in the late 1200s B.C.?

During the 1200s B.C., the pharaohs worked to restore Egypt's greatness. They fought battles for more territory, increased Egypt's wealth through trade, and built large temples and monuments.

Ramses II

The most successful of these pharaohs was Ramses II (RAM • seez), who ruled from 1279 B.C. to 1213 B.C. Ramses conquered the region of Canaan and moved north into Syria. To get this territory, he fought the Hittites, who lived in present-day Turkey. After many battles, Ramses and the Hittite king signed a peace treaty.

Age of Temples

During his 66-year reign, Ramses also devoted himself to peaceful activities. Ramses II and other New Kingdom rulers had many temples built throughout Egypt. One of the most magnificent was Karnak (KAHR • nack) at Thebes. Its huge columned hall still impresses visitors today. A poem celebrating a victory by Ramses is carved in the temple. In part of the poem, Ramses says this to his chariot driver:

"Halt! take courage, charioteer, As a sparrow-hawk swoops down upon his prey, So I swoop upon the foe, and I will slay, I will hew [cut] them into pieces, I will dash them into dust."

— from Pen-ta-tur: The Victory of Ramses II Over the Khita
Most Egyptians prayed in their homes, so temples were used only for special occasions. Egyptians saw the temples as the homes of their deities. Priests and priestesses performed daily rituals, washed the statues of the deities, and brought them food.

Temples were important to Egypt's economy. Priests hired people to work in temple workshops and granaries. Temples also served as banks. Egyptians used them to store valuable items, such as gold jewelry, fragrant oils, and finely woven textiles.

**Why Did Egypt Decline?**

After Ramses II died, Egypt declined. Pharaohs fought costly wars. Armies from the eastern Mediterranean attacked Egypt. By 1150 B.C., the Egyptian empire controlled only the Nile delta.

In the 900s B.C., the Libyans conquered Egypt. Then, the people of Kush seized power. Finally, in 670 B.C., Egypt was taken over by the Assyrians from Mesopotamia.

**Summarizing** What were the accomplishments of Ramses II?

**LESSON 3 REVIEW**

**Review Vocabulary**

1. Why would someone want to buy incense?

2. What might have been the duties of an ancient Egyptian envoy?

**Answer the Guiding Questions**

3. **Describing** Discuss two reasons why the Middle Kingdom period was a "golden age" for Egypt.

4. **Explaining** Why was the New Kingdom a unique period in ancient Egypt's history?

5. **Summarizing** Describe the religious changes brought about by Akhenaton and Tutankhamen.

6. **Analyzing** In what ways were temples important to Egypt's economy?

7. **ARGUMENT** You are a scribe who works for Queen Hatshepsut. Write a brief report that explains why she is a good pharaoh and deserves the support of the people.