Ancient Egypt
The Archaic & The Old Kingdom
The First Pharaohs?
- Abydos is one of the most important (late) Predynastic centers in Upper Egypt.

- The **Umm el-Qa’ab** is where many 1\textsuperscript{st} Dynasty kings constructed their tombs.

- Several have been identified as belonging to monarchs immediately preceding, or belonging to the beginning of, the 1\textsuperscript{st} Dynasty (Iri-Hor, Ka, Narmer, Horus Aha)
Why Abydos?
Why was Abydos chosen to be the location for royal burials?

Instead of being a politically significant center, Abydos was mythologically/religiously important.

Abydos was always important as the mythological entrance to the Du’at (the underworld), and was therefore chosen for reasons of ideology.
Menes
Egyptian tradition states that the first Pharaoh was **Menes** – who founded his capital in Memphis.

The name Menes might derive from the Egyptian word *mn*, which means, “to endure, to be permanent.”

*Mn* is used in later dynastic times to represent the head of state.

The name Menes could simply be a title, and not the actual name of the first pharaoh of the first dynasty.
Hor-Aha
Horus-Aha/Aha
First or second king of the First Dynasty - some scholars identified him with king Menes

- Name appears on the Palermo Stone

- Possibly the son of Narmer
Djer
Djer is the second or third king of the 1st Dynasty

Associated with the nearby tomb of Merneith - who was probably his queen, and mother of Den
Den
- 4\textsuperscript{th} Pharaoh of the 1\textsuperscript{st} Dynasty

- Son of Merneith - most likely son of Djer

- First Pharaoh to wear the double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt (and use the title)

- Writing is further standardized during his reign
The Archaic

Political Expansion
Both the southern and northern areas of country received political attention during the reign of Djer - a rock inscription at Wadi Halfa indicating an expansion of Egyptian authority into the south.

The Palermo Stone documents an expedition into the Sinai under the reign of Djer.

Military expedition into Palestine or the Sinai under Den.
The text says: "First time of smiting the East". The location might be southern Palestine or Sinai, but the mountains east of the Nile might also be possible.
The Archaic
Political & Religious Institutions
By the end of the 1st Dynasty, we see religious/political institutions/symbols that will endure for thousands of years:

- The consistent use of the double crown (Den)

- title *nsw bty*, “King of Upper and Lower Egypt.” (Den)

- the appearance of the *heb sed* (also referred to as the jubilee), a powerful festival which reaffirmed the king's dominance over the two lands.
By the end of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Dynasty, we see the solidification of Egyptian political culture:

- Pharaoh controlled a strongly centralized state and ruled from the capital at Memphis.

- He was assisted by a centralized bureaucracy headed by two viziers (prime ministers): one who oversaw the north and one who oversaw the south.

- The country was divided into a series of districts (called nomes), each of which was overseen by a governor (called a nomarch) who was directly responsible to the vizier.
The Old Kingdom

3rd – 6th Dynasties
2686 – 2181 BC
Unlike the period of unification/Post-unification, more sources from the Old Kingdom allow a more complete view of the Egyptian state.
Old Kingdom Political Structure
Society was heavily stratified and ruled by an semi-diving king who was omnipotent and omnipresent.

Pharaoh was assisted by a multi-tiered administration dominated by members of the royal family.

Nomarches were required periodic visits to the capital – a strategy designed to reinforce the king’s control over the various provinces.
The Pyramid Age
The apogee of royal power was reached in the 4th Dynasty, the so-called Pyramid age.

Most of the kings of the 4th Dynasty constructed, or at least began construction or, at least one pyramid tomb.
The number of workers on the great Pyramid of Khufu has been estimated at 10,000 individuals.

These building projects were supported by state funds derived from an annual tax on agricultural yield.

The workers, who were free citizens compensated for their efforts, were divided into “work gangs” who labored in seasonal shifts.

Work on specific projects went on throughout the year, as one group of workers relieved another.
What is so Important about Pyramids?
The state had the ability to conscript and mobilize massive numbers of workers, acquire the necessary materials, and to coordinate the myriad aspects of pyramid building.

The success of the projects is a reflection of the power, prestige, and administrative ability of the early state during the Old Kingdom.
Economics of the Old Kingdom
- The economy was based on agriculture - 75% of the population were farmers who grew emmer wheat, barley, and vegetables on their own land or share-cropped fields.

- In theory, all of the land in Egypt belonged to the king.

- Parcels were distributed to individuals for state service.
Each year, state officials surveyed fields - assessed a proportion of the yield (deposited in the local state controlled granaries)

These stocks were used to “pay” state employees.

Large portions of the land was controlled by various temples.

Harvests from temple lands supported large numbers of priests and employees of the religious establishment.
End