

Egypt in the Middle Kingdom (2030-1640 B.C.)
The British Museum

Ancient Egypt: The Middle Kingdom

Following the reunification of Egypt by the Theban king Nebhepetre Mentuhotep II (about 2055-2004 BC), the first king of the Twelfth Dynasty, Amenemhat I, founded a new capital south of Memphis, called Itjtawy. He also annexed Lower Nubia, primarily in order to control the gold resources of the area. The Twelfth Dynasty was made up of a series of mostly strong rulers, all except the last named Amenemhat or Senwosret, who expanded and maintained Egyptian control to the south and even, to a limited extent, in the Near East.

Kings and other members of the royal family were buried in pyramids close to the new capital. Provincial governors and other local officials were buried in rock-cut tombs in their own districts. These were provisioned with funerary equipment including models and furniture, and with coffins decorated with extracts from the *Coffin Texts* and *Book of Two Ways*, the funerary literature of the time. The literature of the Middle Kingdom covered all aspects of society, from legal documents and letters to wisdom literature and myths. These writings provide insight into the social, religious and political concerns of the time.

Royal sculpture of the Middle Kingdom showed the king as a strong figure, often with prominent ears. From the reign of Senwosret III (1874-1855 BC) onwards, rulers of the Middle Kingdom were represented as careworn, while earlier royal images had been smiling and youthful. Wealthy private individuals could place statues in temples for the first time, often choosing the newly developed block statue.