

Military of ancient egypt: warfare

[History](#), [Ancient History](#)



Egypt's military holds as much interest and rich history as other studies of the ancient era. The world's first armies are known for the invention and spread of agriculture coupled with the domestication of animals in the fifth millennium, of which set the stage for the emergence of the first large-scale, complex urban societies around 4000 B. C. (Gabriel & Metz, 1991). Within five hundred years, the stone tools and weapons used by the ancient Egyptian military evolved to bronze of which its manufacture marked a warfare revolution.

Birth of warfare was possible as Egyptian societies emerged in complexity and with fully articulated social structures that provided stability and legitimacy to new social roles and behaviors. Ancient Egyptian urban societies experienced a revolution in social structures that rested upon the new economic base and was most important to the emergence of war.

Gabriel & Metz (1991) credit the conduct of war as a legitimate social function supported by an extensive institutional infrastructure, noted by the authors as a " mechanism of cultural development" (p. 3). Warfare was an indispensable function of the social order in ancient Egypt in order for people were to survive the predatory behavior of others.

During the fourth millennium in Egypt, a range of social, political, economic, psychological, and military technologies emerged. The purpose of the emergence was to make the conduct of war a normal part of social existence. Egypt evolved from a state in which warfare was rare and typically ritualistic to one in which death and destruction were achieved on a modern scale.

During this same period, warfare assumed great proportions in the size of the armies involved, the administrative mechanisms needed to sustain them, the development of weapons, the frequency of occurrence, and the scope of destruction achievable by military force (Gabriel & Metz, 1991). This marked the fully emergence of the one of the world's first armies.

According to studies by Dollinger (2000), the use of bronze weapons (referenced earlier) is believed to have originated during the Middle Kingdom. Dollinger believes " bronze Middle Kingdom arrowheads may have been imported from the Middle East" and further explains the production and manufacture of bronze in Egypt " became common only in the time of the 18th dynasty" (para 1). Egypt's dependence on other areas for production and import of weapons put it at a disadvantage compared to the rising empires of the east during the first millennium BCE.

Furthermore, Dollinger asserts that copper and bronze casting and hammering may have been developed by the Egyptians themselves (para 2). The production and manufacture of weapons was handled in armories where the complete weaponry was also stored.

" When his majesty took action against the Asiatic sand-dwellers, his majesty made an army of many tens of thousands from all of Upper Egypt: ...; from Lower Egypt: ...; and from Irtjet-Nubians, Medja-Nubians, Yam-Nubians, Wawat-Nubians, Kaau-Nubians; and from Tjemeh-land." (TheAutobiographyof Weni; Lichtheim M, Ancient Egyptian Literature Vol. 1, p. 19)

Prior to the conquest of Lower Egypt by the Hyksos, the majority of all conflicts the Egyptians fought had been civil wars (Dollinger, 2000; Schulman, 1964). The armies, predominately handled via draft led by noblemen, were comprised peasants and artisans. It was during the period of the Old Kingdom that foreigners were incorporated into the army. Historians, including Dollinger (2000), believe the Egyptians may have signed contracts with foreign potentates to insure the supply of mercenaries.

As the Egyptian army evolved, old traditions became obsolete, making it easier for advancement. In fact, many army commanders reached kingship. Such notable kings include Horemheb and Ramses I (XIX Dynasty). Many of the new kings “surrounded themselves with former soldiers whose loyalty and self-sacrifice they had experienced” (Dollinger, 2000). One soldier was Didu, a professional soldier appointed to the post of responsible for the deserts east of Thebes. He later became representative to foreign countries, “standard bearer” (leader) of the king’s guard, captain of the ship Meri-amen, and commander of the police force (2000).

As time progressed, finding capable soldiers became almost impossible. Empires expanded, making the need even greater. It was during this time that the Egyptians began to enlist prisoners of war into their army (e. g. Sherden, captured during the incursions of the Sea Peoples) (Dollinger, 2000; Schulman, 1964).

During the late period in ancient Egypt, foreign commanders, even those of a different ethnic group, frequently led mercenary troops. However, foreigner’s allegiance was often far from what the Egypt army needed. Dollinger

explains, "...obedience was not always ensured" (2000). Nevertheless, such disobedience was handled accordingly, even in a most violent manner (e. g., Phanes of Halicarnassos deserted to Cambyses; his troops punished him by killing his children before his eyes).

Egyptian history -especially that of its military- is comprised of diversity and rich changes. Covering all aspects and timelines within these pages is impossible. However, through the brief references, this paper supports ancient Egyptian military as a strong emerging force that advanced from a subtle state to a mass enterprise. The military was formerly known as a meek unit, rarely engaging in any major battle. Today, historians reveal the Egyptian military and its evolution as one of the finest and most notable armies in the world.

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