



# Menes

## Pharaoh of Dynasty I



### Menes 3100-2850 B.C.

Also known as Aha and Scorpion, Menes was the first pharaoh of the 1<sup>st</sup> Dynasty in Egypt. He ruled some time between 3100-2850 B.C during the Protodynastic era of Egypt's history. This time period was characterized by "firm political structure of the land which was unified by the pharaoh" (Ancient Egypt-Narmers Palette). Menes was credited with unifying Upper and Lower Egypt into a single kingdom. He may have accomplished this with military force and/or by peaceful means such as marriages or administrative measures. Besides unifying Egypt, Menes also founded the city of Crocodopolis where he built the first temple to Ptah (Menes), and also the city of Memphis, which he made his capitol. The city of Memphis situated 28 km south of modern day Cairo on an island on the Nile River. This location was most likely chosen because it would make it easier to protect the city from invading armies, and also because it would allow the pharaoh to control the river delta and trade routes to Sinai and Canaan. The Greek Herodotus wrote about the construction of Memphis by Menes. His writings can be viewed at: <http://www.touregypt.net/herodtusmenes.htm>

During his reign Menes expanded the kingdom and its influence to the first cataract on the Nile, sent ambassadors to Canaan and Byblos in Phoenicia where he developed commercial trade links, and also attacked the Nubians to the south (Menes (Aha) 1<sup>st</sup> Dynasty). Menes had two wives, Queen Berenib and Neithotepe. Neithotepe was the mother of Menes' only son and heir, Djer. After Menes died, Neithotepe became regent until Djer came of age to rule Egypt. Menes died when he was sixty-three years old by either being attacked by "wild dogs and Nile crocodiles in Faiyum" (Menes) or by hippopotamus. His tomb is at Saqqara, which was a necropolis of Memphis.

### Narmer

Also known as King Catfish, Narmer was the last ruler of the Egyptian Dynasty 0 and was later recognized as the 1<sup>st</sup> pharaoh of the 1<sup>st</sup> Egyptian Dynasty. He contributed to the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt and this unification is shown both on the Palette and Macehead of Narmer. After the unification of the two Egypts, all later pharaohs were known as "ruler of the two lands" or "King of Upper and Lower Egypt."

This warrior-god-king of either Thinite or Hierakonpolite origins brought about economic growth and political stability in Egypt. He fought against the Delta rulers, kept trade going with the near eastern colonies, and kept military control over Egypt's boundaries (Narmer). Narmer was married to a princess from the north called Nithotep. It is not known whether this princess was the same woman who was married to the Pharaoh Menes, or if Narmer and Nithotep had any children. Narmer reigned for at least 35 years and his tomb is at Abydos in the double grave of B17-18, which was excavated by Petrie in 1900.

### Controversy

There is a great deal of controversy surrounding whether these men are the same person or three separate people. This controversy is further discussed at Narmer, Menes, Aha controversy. Although there is evidence that suggests both, there has been no definitive conclusion either way. The evidence that suggests they were the same man lies in two artifacts recovered at Nahal Tillah and in Umm el-Ka'ab. The first artifact discovered was the Narmer Palette found in Quibell. The palette shows King Narmer unifying Upper and Lower Egypt; on one end of the palette Narmer wears the red crown of Lower Egypt and on the other the white crown of Upper Egypt. At first glance it would appear that this is evidence of Narmer being a separate being from Menes. However, the Greek historian Herodotus had written in his work that Menes was the ruler that unified Egypt and the founder of the first dynasty.

One possible explanation of the two individuals being one ruler was found at the site Nahal Tillah. At this site a sherd was found with the serekh of king Narmer. This serekh had the Horus names of the Egyptian kings, showing that the Egyptian kings had five royal names, in this sherd also were the signs for mn (Menes) without further title but adjacent to the Horus name of Narmer. This would lead to the conclusion that Menes' royal name included Narmer. The same sherd contains the name Aha that could signify that Aha was part of King Menes name. There is also the legend surrounding how Menes and Aha died. Both were said to have been attacked by a hippopotamus and killed. Whether a literal or representative hippo is not said but for both to have died in this same strange fashion seems highly unlikely. There is also the fact that both Menes and Aha have been credited with founding the city of Memphis.

### Narmer Serekh Sherd ca. 3,000 BCE,

There is more evidence that these are three separate men. There seems to be some evidence that Menes was the ruler of lower Egypt at the time of the unification, lower Egypt was the more civilized of the two halves, and is created with building Memphis. Herodotus' history says that Menes (Min) was a great builder. Building Memphis required the damming of the Nile and the creation of a lake. He also built many temples in and around Memphis. Papyrus was invented during his reign, which led to the written evidence of his rule. His tomb has been located in [Abydos](#) with his mummy still intact.

The evidence that there was a king named Narmer exists in artifacts that bear his name and in written hieroglyphs from this period. The artifacts that have Narmer's name include the two mentioned above as well as a mace-head. Some of the explanations given for how Narmer and Menes could both be the unifier of Egypt are varied but the most reasonable seems to be that Narmer was king after Menes and was responsible for the unification of the governments of Upper and Lower Egypt. The surviving records of Narmer also show he was a great conqueror and possibly captured the land "Tjehenu," or what is present-day Libya. With his many conquests inside and outside of Egypt, he became wealthy and probably created the elite upper class. His tomb has been identified in Umm Qa'ab; just north of the royal cemetery in which Menes tomb was found.

### The Narmer Mace-head

Aha has the least amount of evidence relating to him and his reign. There is a commemoration with his name on it celebrating the Egyptian rule of the area surrounding the first cataract on the Nile. He founded the city of Crocodopolis, supposedly after he was saved by a crocodile from a pack of wild dogs. He also was buried near Abydos, which has led to some of the controversy between Aha and Menes.

There was a story circulated for some time that Narmer was the grandson of Menes and Aha was his father. This could explain why Narmer is shown as the unifier of Egypt on the Palette and the Mace Head- perhaps he was trying to take credit for the accomplishments of his grandfather. It is also possible that Menes was the grandson and was responsible for misplacing of the Narmer Palette for so long. It could also explain why both Menes and Aha were credited with the founding of Memphis if Menes was the son or father of Aha and one of them tried to take credit for the others work.

We will probably never know for sure whether these were all the same man or three separate rulers. The evidence could go either way and the professional scholars disagree on most of the points listed above. There are some wonderful web sites that explore the controversy listed in the bibliography.

### The Palette of Narmer

The Palette of Narmer is from the main deposit at Hierakonpolis in Egypt, and was found in the temple of Horus of Nekhen by J. E. Quibell and Green in 1899. It dates from the Predynastic period from about 3000-2920 B.C and is made of slate of approximately two feet one inch high. The palette is plain with low relief decorations on it and these decorations depict Narmer's capture of land and punishment of Northern rebels. These pictures could be a tribute to Narmer's success in his military victory over the Delta people or they could be used symbolically to show the Pharaoh's ability at overcoming evil. The daily use for the palette was to prepare eye makeup, which was used in ancient Egypt to protect the eyes against the effects of the sun's glare.

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#### Images

Narmer jar sherd at <http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/narmer.htm>

Narmer Mace head at [http://www.ancient-egypt.org/kings/00v\\_scorpion/macehead.html](http://www.ancient-egypt.org/kings/00v_scorpion/macehead.html)

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Narmer palette at <http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/narmer.htm>

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## Feature Story

### King Catfish, Also Called Narmer

By Marie Parsons

The unification of Egypt at the end of the [Predynastic period](#) took place in two stages: spread of a uniform material culture, as evidenced by the diffusion of products characteristic of the Naqada culture, centered around the city of [Naqada](#), also called Nubt, and the establishment of unified political control. Later Egyptian tradition contains references to the existence of separate northern and southern kingdoms, perhaps at [Buto](#) in the Delta and [Hierakonpolis](#) in Upper Egypt, respectively.



Hierakonpolis has been producing much evidence of its being an important center. It was a major urbanized center of the Naqada culture and a residence of powerful Upper Egyptian chiefs. The two-sided Narmer palette, for example, is interpreted as being a thanks-offering for the successful definitive victory of the southern over the northern kingdoms.



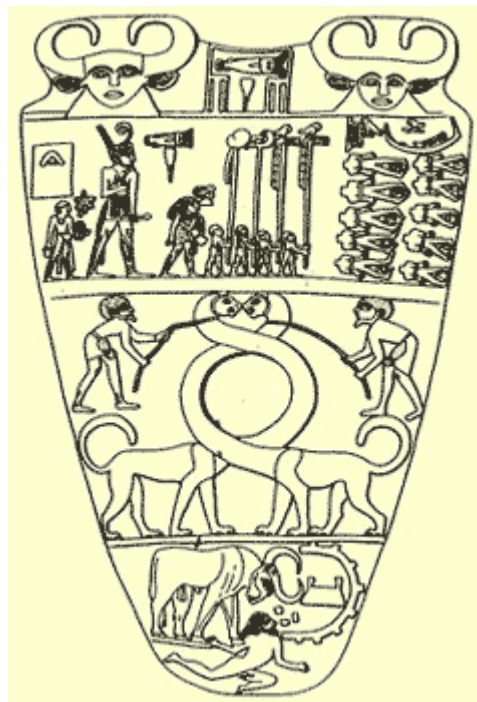
**Narmer Palette**

King Narmer is thought to have reigned c. 3150 BCE as first king of the [1st dynasty](#)

(and/or last king of the [0 dynasty](#)) of a unified ancient Egypt. The rebus of his name as shown on his palette and on other inscriptions is composed of a chisel, thought to be read *mr*, above a catfish, thought to be read as *n'r*. King Narmer, or Catfish as he could also be called, appears thus on seal impressions from the 1st Dynasty tombs of [King Den \(tomb\)](#) and King Ka ([Tomb](#)) at [Abydos](#) (where we believe he may have himself [built a tomb](#)), and also at Tell Ibrahmin Awad. Narmer's name and that of his possible predecessor [Scorpion](#) have also been found on pottery vessels from the site of Minshat Abu Omar in the eastern Delta. The name of Narmer also occurs in Hierakonpolis on objects in addition to the Palette and Macehead such as potsherds etc.

Narmer's importance as the probable unifier of Lower and Upper Egypt is indicated primarily by the Palette and the Macehead which are attributed to him. His name-rebus appear on both. But his power in the region must have extended further, since Egyptian sherds inscribed with Narmer's name have also been found and in southern Palestine.

The Narmer Palette was discovered by [J.E.Quibell](#) at Hierakonpolis in 1897-98. The obverse is divided into three registers, uppermost of which gives his name in a serekh flanked by human-faced bovines. The second register shows Narmer wearing the [White Crown of Upper Egypt](#) smiting an enemy. The third register shows dead, nude enemies. On the reverse the upper register showing his name-serekh is repeated. The second register shows Narmer now wearing the [Red Crown of Lower Egypt](#), inspecting rows of nude, decapitated enemies. The third register shows a man mastering serpent-necked lions, and the fourth register shows a bull destroying a town and trampling a dead enemy.



Narmer may have considered Buto as the central capital of the Delta he had just conquered. On his palette is a hieroglyphic group that could be read as Ta Mehu, the later name for the Delta region. Since Narmer is shown with the [Red Crown](#) he was thus the first to ascribe this Crown to the entire Delta and thus Lower Egypt. He may have transferred the Red Crown from Nubt/Naqada to represent the entirety of Lower Egypt.

The Narmer macehead, also discovered at Hierakonpolis, has had three interpretations. [Petrie](#)'s theory, also held by later scholars, was that the mace head depicted the political marriage of Nithotep, princess of the north, with Narmer. Other scholars feel the macehead depicts a celebration by Narmer of his conquest of the north, while still others regard the macehead as commemorating a [Sed-festival](#) of the king. Nithotep's grave has been found at Naqada, with Narmer's name as well as with [King Aha](#)'s name. Nithotep thus is linked with two kings as wife and mother.



**Narmer Macehead**

Most recently, new studies of the images on the macehead put forth the theory that the scenes are not primarily commemorative but are simply pictorial versions of year-names. The focus of the scene is the king's figure, seen sitting robed in a long cloak enthroned under a canopy on a high dais, wearing the Red Crown and holding a flail. The enclosure within which he sits can be interpreted as a shrine or temple. He is attended by minor figures of fan-bearers, bodyguards, with long quarterstaves and an official who may be either vizier or heir-apparent. In front of Narmer three men run a race towards him, while above them stands four men carrying standards. Facing the king is a cloaked and beardless figure, over whom is a simple enclosure in which stands a cow and calf (a nome sign).

The running figures may represent Muu dancers, long associated with Buto, presenting a welcome to the new lord of the Delta. The seated figure facing Narmer may be the chief of Buto rather than a princess of the Delta.

Beneath these figures are symbols of numbers. The numbers have been recently interpreted to indicate 400,000 cattle, 1,422,000 small animals, and 120,000 men (not women and children, only males.) This would have provided for a total human population of the Delta of perhaps 600,000.

The macehead then commemorates the completion of the conquest of Lower Egypt, not with a royal dynastic marriage etc, but perhaps, with the first Appearance of the King of Lower Egypt, by an actual census of the Delta people, similar to and a precursor of the census taken by William the Conqueror after he won England.

Some scholars speculate that [Menes](#) and Narmer may be the same person. Menes is the Greek form of the name of the legendary first human king of Egypt as given by Manetho, the historian living in Hellenistic times who constructed one form of King Lists.



Jar-sealings found by Petrie at Abydos associate the "mn" glyph, the gaming board, from which Menes apparently receives his name, with Narmer. Narmer was shown in a serekh and Meni was shown in an unenclosed space, like a son and heir.



Hor-Aha, the first king of the 1st Dynasty and thus Narmer's probable successor and possibly his son by Queen Nithotep, perhaps took the second royal name of *Men*, which means "established", thus being the origin of the name *Menes*.

Evidence indicating all this is an ivory label from the tomb of Queen Nithotep at Naqada. It shows the name Hor-Aha, and the name Men, in front of it.

Sources: The *Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, *Egypt Before the Pharaohs* by Michael Rice, *Journal of the ARCE*, 1990, *Narmer: First King of Upper and Lower Egypt, a Reconsideration of His Palette and Macehead*, Abstract by Frank Yurco, published in *JSSEA* #XXV, and *Early Egypt: Rise of Civilisation in the Nile Valley* by A.J. Spencer

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