



Ancient Egypt

TERMS & NAMES

papyrus
pyramid
pharaoh
hieroglyphics
Re
Horus

MAIN IDEA

The civilization of the ancient Egyptians developed in response to both its desert environment and the flooding waters of the Nile River.

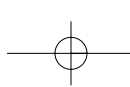
WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The ancient Egyptian civilization is a model of a well-organized society with limited natural resources.



Ancient Egypt and the Nile

Many of the temples and other monumental structures of ancient Egypt still stand. Without the Nile River, however, they probably would never have been built. As the Greek historian Herodotus (huh•RAHD•uh•tuhs) said approximately 2,500 years ago, Egyptian civilization was "the gift of the Nile."



Human-Environment Interaction • This page from the Book of the Dead was drawn on papyrus. ◀

The River in the Sand Desert covers most of Egypt. The sands spread for hundreds of miles to the west and the south, discouraging outsiders from invading. The Nile River, which runs through the desert, is sometimes called “the river in the sand.”

The Nile’s yearly floods deposited tons of silt in the river valley. The deposits made the soil black and fertile. Every year, around October, the floodwaters began to retreat. Then the farmers planted their seeds. They harvested their crops during the months the Nile was at its lowest levels. The Egyptians knew the Nile would flood each year. But they could not predict how much it would flood or how high the water would rise. In years with very low floods, there might not be enough food. In years with very high floods, the waters would destroy fields and homes.

Taming the Nile The ancient Egyptians found ways to manage the unpredictable river. They built canals to carry water from the Nile to the parts of the land the flooding water did not reach. They strengthened the riverbanks to keep the river from overflowing.

Egyptian towns and cities were spread along the Nile River valley. The Nile made it possible for Egyptians living in distant places to come together. The Egyptians were expert boat builders. They built harbors and ports for large cargo boats. The Nile provided such good transportation that there were few roads in ancient Egypt. Because goods moved easily along the Nile, trade was very profitable.

The Nile’s Gifts The ancient Egyptians used Nile mud to make pottery and bricks. They made a paperlike material called **papyrus** (peh•PYE•res) from the papyrus plant. This tall plant grew in marshes and swamps around the Nile. In fact, the English word *paper* comes from “papyrus.” It was easier to write on papyrus than on the bulky clay tablets the Mesopotamians used.



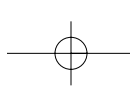
Place • Papyrus reeds grow along the Nile River. ▲

Vocabulary

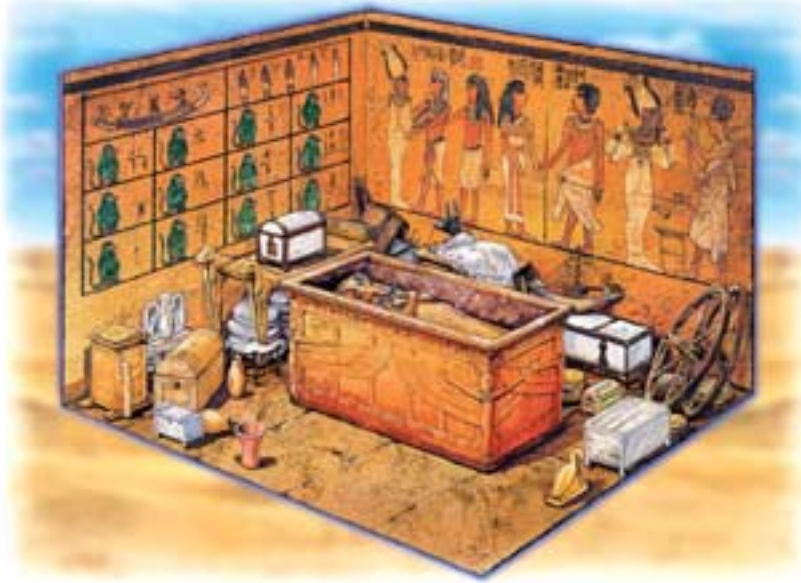
silt:
particles of earth and rock that build up in rivers or streams

Reading Social Studies

A. Identifying Problems What problems did the Nile River cause Egyptian farmers?



Tutankhamen's Tomb



Place • In 1922, the tomb of Egyptian king Tutankhamen (toot-ahng-KHA-muhn) was found almost exactly as it had been left thousands of years before. Although his tomb may be the most famous, Tutankhamen was not buried in a pyramid. He was buried in an area now known as the Valley of the Tombs of the Kings. ◀

Vocabulary

afterlife:
a life believed
to follow death

The Great Builders

The Egyptians noticed that bodies buried in the sand on the edge of the desert resisted decay. It may have affected their beliefs in an afterlife. The concept of an afterlife played a central role in ancient Egyptian life and culture. It led the Egyptians to build huge **pyramids**, as well as many other temples and monuments.

The Pyramids Pyramids are easily recognized by their shape. Four triangular sides on a rectangular base meet at a single point. The Egyptians built the pyramids for their kings, or **pharaohs** (FAIR•ohz). Each pyramid is a palace where an Egyptian king planned to spend the afterlife.

Materials and Labor To build the pyramids, the Egyptians used large blocks of stone. A single pyramid might contain 92 million cubic feet of stone, enough to fill a large sports stadium. The tips of pyramids were often capped with gold.

Building a pyramid was complicated. The pharaoh appointed a leader to organize the project. The leader and his staff used **hieroglyphics**—a writing system that uses pictographs to stand for words or sounds—to make lists of the workers and supplies they needed for the project.

BACKGROUND

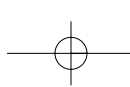
Nubia (NOO•bee-uh), a country to the south of Egypt, was a source of the gold the Egyptians used in their pyramids.

Citizenship IN ACTION

Recording the Past The great statues and monuments of ancient Egypt have lasted thousands of years, but they will not last forever. They are threatened by pollution and other changes in the environment. Now a nonprofit group called INSIGHT (Institute for the Study and Implementation of Graphic Heritage Techniques) is using the latest technology, such as digital photography and laser scanning, to record Egypt's cultural heritage.

Working with archaeologists, INSIGHT volunteers record ancient tombs, temples, and statues before they fall apart or are destroyed. The results will be used for research and educational purposes.



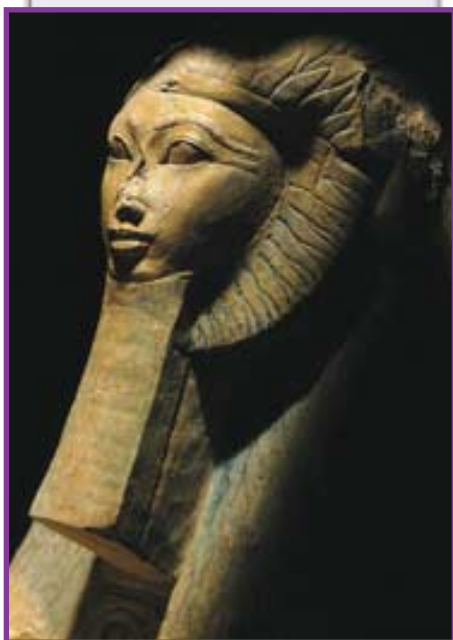


Biography

Hatshepsut (hat•SHEP•soot) was the first woman to rule Egypt. Like male pharaohs, she wore a tightly braided false beard.

Hatshepsut came to the throne around 1500 B.C., when her husband, the pharaoh Thutmose II, died. The throne passed to Thutmose III, Hatshepsut's stepson. Because he was a child, Hatshepsut acted as ruler. Even when he grew up, she refused to give him the throne. Instead, she had herself proclaimed pharaoh and ruled for 20 years.

She encouraged foreign trade and building projects, including a number of magnificent temples.



their gods and honored the spirits of dead family members.

Culture • Egyptian artists' drawings followed rules. Eyes and shoulders were drawn as if from the front, the rest of the body sideways. Important people were drawn larger than others. ►

The Egyptians had no cutting tools or machines to get the stone they needed. Removing the stone and shaping it into blocks was very difficult work. The work was also dangerous. Every Egyptian family had to help with the project. They either worked as laborers or provided food for the workers.

The Pharaoh and the Gods

Egyptians believed that the ruling pharaoh was the living son of the sun god, **Re** (RAY). The pharaoh was also linked with **Horus**, the sky god. The pharaoh was not only ancient Egypt's chief judge and commander-in-chief, he was also the chief religious figure. His religious example guided the common people in their daily lives and in their preparations for the afterlife.

Religion in Daily Life Temples were everywhere in ancient Egypt. Some were dedicated to major gods, like Re. Others were dedicated to local gods. Pharaohs had temples built in their honor so that people could worship them.

Ordinary citizens did not gather for prayer in the temples. Only priests carried out the temple rituals.

Smaller buildings stood outside the temple grounds where common people could pray or leave offerings to the gods. Many private homes also contained small shrines where family members worshiped

Reading Social Studies

B. Making Inferences How important was their religion to Egyptians?





Preparing for the Afterlife Average Egyptians were not buried in pyramids. They made careful preparations for the afterlife, however. Family members were responsible for burying their dead relatives and tending their spirits. Egyptians believed they could help the dead person live comfortably in the afterlife. They prevented bodies from decaying by treating them with preservatives, or mummifying them. The Egyptians filled tombs with items for the dead to use in the afterlife and they decorated the tombs with art. They also made regular offerings to honor the dead.



Culture • Osiris and Isis were the Egyptian god and goddess of the dead. ◀



Culture • A mask covers this mummy's face. ▲

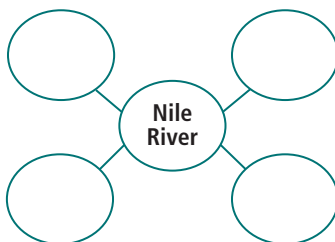
SECTION 3 ASSESSMENT

Terms & Names

1. Identify: (a) papyrus (b) pyramid (c) pharaoh
(d) hieroglyphics (e) Re (f) Horus

Taking Notes

2. Use a spider map like this one to record all the ways the Nile River benefited the ancient Egyptians.



Main Ideas

3. (a) Why did the Egyptians build pyramids?
(b) How did the use of hieroglyphics help Egyptian builders?
(c) Why was the pharaoh so important to the Egyptians?

Critical Thinking

4. Summarizing

How did belief in an afterlife affect the culture of the ancient Egyptians?

Think About

- ♦ burial practices
- ♦ buildings

ACTIVITY -OPTION-

Suppose that you are an ancient Egyptian. Write a **journal entry** about the daily work of an inhabitant of ancient Egypt.