

# Ancient Egypt: Land of the Pharaohs

## Words to Know

<b>desert</b>	dry, sandy land with little or no plant life
<b>upstream</b>	in the direction against the flow of the river; at the upper part of a river
<b>pharaoh</b>	a king of ancient Egypt
<b>tax</b>	money paid to support a government
<b>tomb</b>	a grave, usually one that is enclosed in stone or cement
<b>pyramid</b>	a huge stone structure with a square base and four triangular sides that meet in a point at the top. Egyptian rulers were buried in the pyramids.
<b>mummy</b>	a dead body kept from rotting by being treated with chemicals and wrapped in cloth
<b>hieroglyphics</b>	a system of writing using pictures or symbols to represent objects, ideas, or sounds
<b>papyrus</b>	a writing paper the Egyptians made from water plants of the same name

## Along the Nile

At one time the area now called the Sahara was a green plain. People lived there. There was water and wildlife. Over time the weather changed. The plain dried up and became a **desert**. The people living there went looking for water. Some of them went to a land called Egypt.

A great river called the Nile ran through Egypt. The Nile River Valley was a swampland. It was a dark jungle filled with dangerous animals. The people needed water badly, so they cleared the land anyway.

They built their villages along the river where the jungle used to be.

Like the Sumerians, the people of Egypt built a civilization along a river. They were able to do this because the land along the Nile had what they needed. The Egyptians learned to farm, to tame animals, to make pottery, and to weave. They learned to make tools from metal.

The weather in Egypt was hot. Each year, in July, the Nile River spilled over its banks in a great flood. Land that stood dry all year was suddenly under water for several weeks. The floods left the land very fertile.

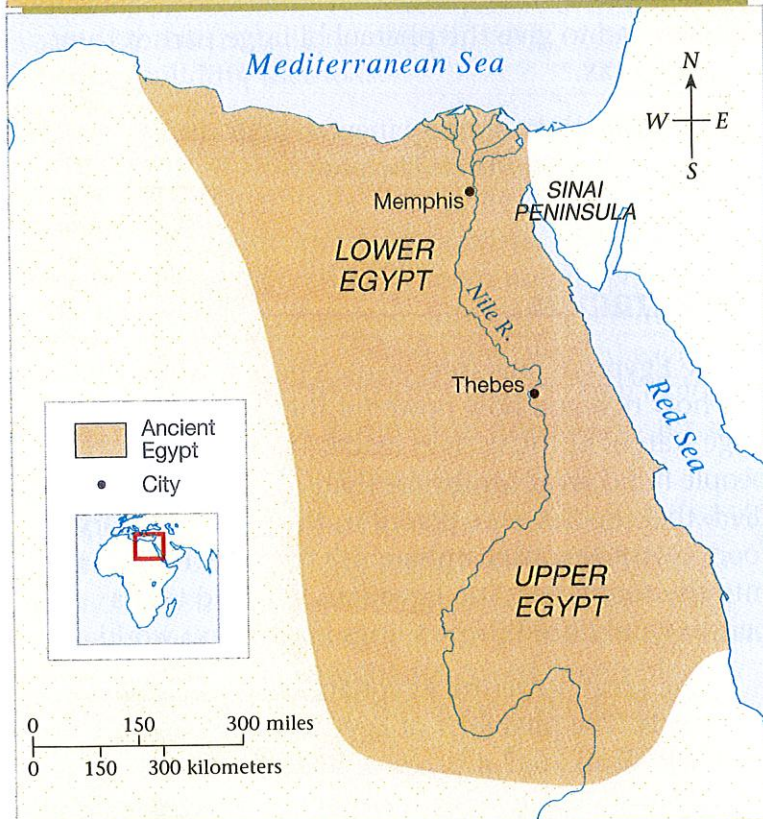
Farmers learned to use the floods to help them. They learned to save up some of the flood waters. Then they could water their crops during the rest of the year. Like the Sumerians, they learned to dig canals to irrigate their fields.

Each July the farmers moved to higher ground, taking their animals with them. They knew that the floods would be over in a few weeks. They waited until the Nile once again flowed peacefully within its banks. Then they planted their seeds in the rich, soft ground.

## Lower Egypt and Upper Egypt Become One

The civilization along the Nile did well. Villages joined together to form larger settlements. There came a time, around 3200 B.C., when two kings ruled all of Egypt. One king ruled Lower Egypt, in the north. Another king ruled Upper Egypt, in the south. A look at the map on page 43 shows each of these areas. The Nile River flows northward. A person in Lower Egypt who followed the Nile River **upstream** would come to Upper Egypt.

## Upper and Lower Egypt



### Map Study

1. What are two ancient Egyptian cities on the map?
2. Which part of Egypt, Upper or Lower, bordered on the Mediterranean Sea?

The king of Lower Egypt wore a red crown. The king of Upper Egypt wore a white crown. The two kings ended up fighting to control all of Egypt. Around 3100 B.C., King Menes of Upper Egypt conquered Lower Egypt. Now Menes wore a "double" crown. He ruled all of Egypt.

King Menes became the first great **pharaoh** of Egypt. The Egyptians called their ruler *pharaoh*, meaning "The Great House."

### You Decide

People today still have to pay taxes. What do you think would happen if a government official used tax money to live a rich life?

The pharaohs were powerful rulers. Each year they collected **taxes**—huge taxes—from all the people. Farmers had to give the pharaoh a large part of their crops as a tax.

The pharaoh had many men to help carry out orders and collect taxes. The pharaohs lived rich, splendid lives.

## The Pyramids

The Egyptian pharaohs wanted people to remember just how rich and how powerful they were. Some had huge statues of themselves made. They also had their people build great **tombs** for them. When the pharaohs died, their bodies were placed in the tombs. Jewelry, food, clothing—all the pharaoh's favorite things—went into the tomb, too. The Egyptians believed that a person would need those things in the next world.

These great, towering Egyptian tombs are called **pyramids**. The pharaohs of Egypt, from about 2650 B.C. until 1637 B.C., were buried within those huge pyramids. There are many pyramids still standing in Egypt today. They are considered one of the wonders of the world.

The most famous pyramid is the Great Pyramid near Cairo. It covers an area larger than ten football fields. It contains more than two million stone blocks, each weighing about 2 1/2 tons. Somehow, the stones had to be cut into shape and then transported to the building site. Then the stones were raised into place. They were laid so that they fit together exactly. From a distance, the pyramid looks as if it were cut out of a single stone. The Egyptians of 4,500 years ago had no

machinery or iron tools. So how did they do it? We do not know for certain. In fact, we do not know if we would be able to build pyramids today, even with our modern building methods.

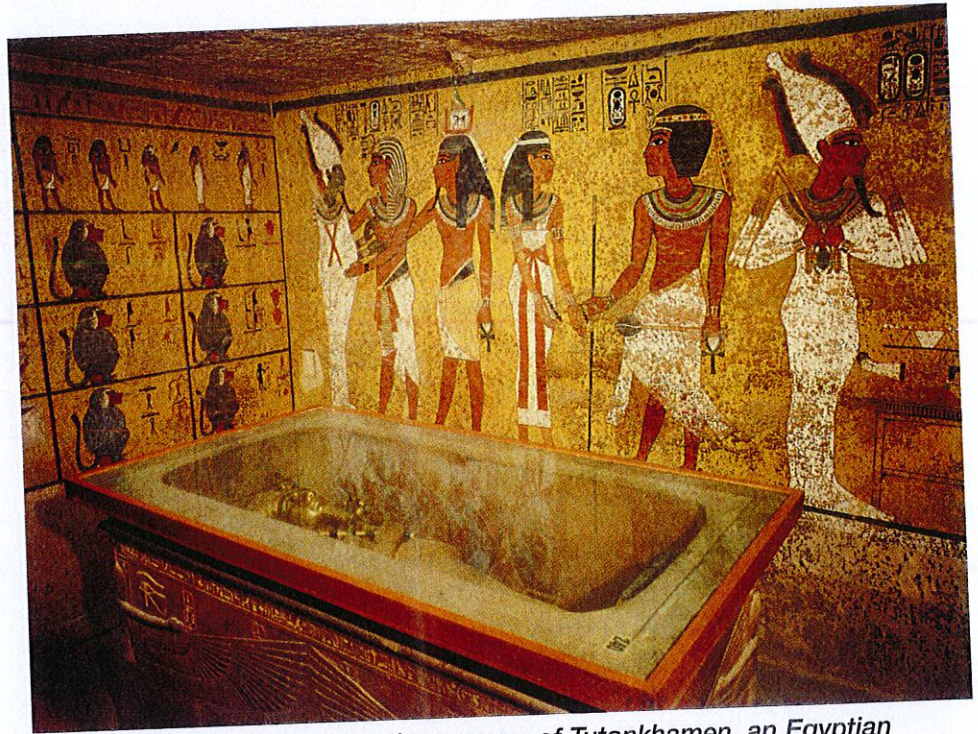
The ancient Egyptians did use copper chisels. They also probably hauled the stones on some sort of wooden sled. Most likely, they built a system of ramps and wooden planks to haul the stones into place. Mostly they had to rely on human muscle power. The ancient Greek historian Herodotus wrote about the pyramids. He said that 400,000 men worked each year for 20 years to build the Great Pyramid. Archaeologists doubt these numbers, but we will never know for sure.

Tombs within the pyramids have served as a wonderful record of the Egyptian civilization. However, robbers have broken into some tombs and stolen the artifacts. Fortunately, archaeologists have discovered some tombs still filled with goods from daily Egyptian life. The walls of the tombs are covered with picture-writing. The pictures tell the story of the ancient Egyptian world.

### ✓ Check Your Understanding

Write your answers in complete sentences.

1. Why did people settle along the Nile River?
2. Why did the Egyptian pharaohs have their people build the pyramids?
3. Why did the pharaohs want all of their favorite things to be buried with them?



*This Egyptian tomb contains the mummy of Tutankhamen, an Egyptian pharaoh.*

## **Egyptian Mummies**

Archaeologists found more than bowls, pictures, jewelry, and pottery within the tombs. They found the pharaohs themselves! The Egyptians used certain chemicals to keep the dead body from rotting away. Of course, only the rich Egyptians could afford this special treatment.

Burying people this way was not a simple matter in ancient Egypt. First, the brain and organs had to be removed from the body. Then the body was treated with a special chemical. It was then wrapped around and around in cloth bandages. A body wrapped like this is called a **mummy**. Many mummies were found deep within the Egyptian tombs. Scientists have removed Egyptian mummies and artifacts from these tombs. They are on display today in museums around the world.

## Egyptian Life and Religion

The Egyptian pharaohs and their nobles lived rich lives. However, all the rest of the people led very simple lives. The farmers worked hard in their fields. There was usually plenty of food. This meant that Egypt's craftworkers had more time to improve their skills.

The Egyptians were concerned about the way they looked. Drawings and statues show Egyptian women with long, dark hair worn in many braids and ringlets.

Both men and women wore makeup. They painted their lips red. They drew around their eyes with a dark green or gray paste called *kohl*. The Egyptians also liked perfume. Both men and women rubbed sweet-smelling oils into their skins.

Most ancient Egyptians believed in many gods. Just as in the land of Sumer, each city had its own special god. Osiris was the powerful god of death.

The river played an important part in Egyptians' lives. It also played a part in their belief about death. They believed that the dead were ferried across a great river to meet Osiris in the next world.

## Egyptian Inventions

The Egyptians learned to write. They invented a system of picture-writing called **hieroglyphics**. They learned to make paper from river reed called **papyrus**. Our word *paper* comes from the word *papyrus*.

The Egyptians learned to chart the stars. They also decided that there were 365 days in a year.

### Remember

The earliest known farming took place along the great rivers of the Middle East. People settled where there was good soil and plenty of water.

### HISTORY FACT

The Egyptian calendar was based on the sun. There were three seasons of 120 days each. There was a five-day celebration at the end of the year.

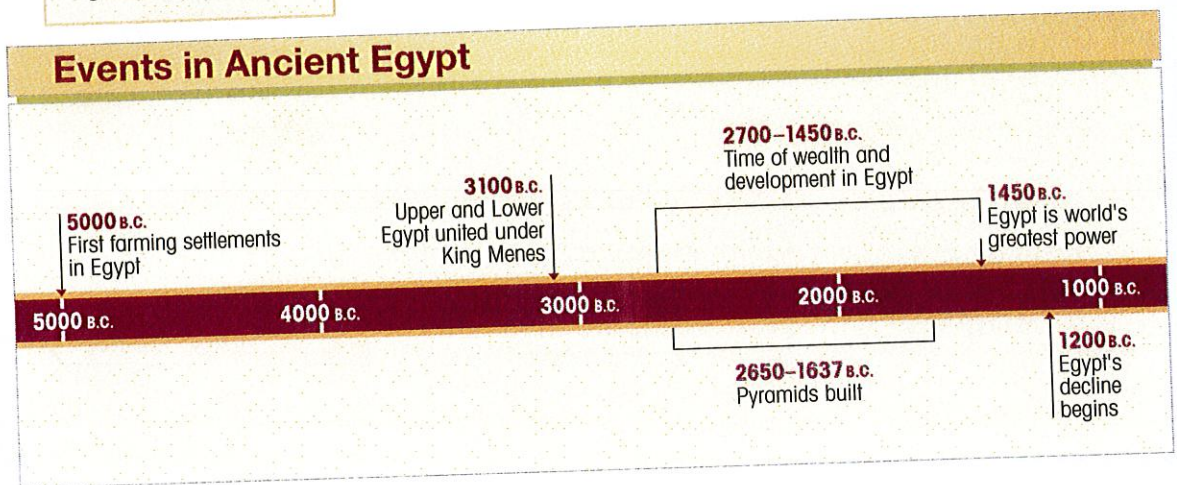
The Egyptians made jewelry of gold and precious stones. They used metals for tools and weapons. The Egyptians made music, too. Archaeologists have found ancient Egyptian instruments and the words to songs. The Egyptians built ships. They traded with other people.

Most of all, the ancient Egyptians are remembered as the builders of the pyramids. The Egyptian builders have left us what may be the most amazing works of any civilization. Most likely, many of their secrets still lie buried within the pyramids.



### Timeline Study

How many years did it take for a unified Egypt to become the world's greatest power?





## WORDS FROM THE PAST

### The Rosetta Stone

Hieroglyphics can still be seen in many places in Egypt. Yet for many hundreds of years, nobody could read them. The meaning of these ancient Egyptian symbols had been lost sometime in the distant past. Then in 1799, a French engineer in Egypt discovered a large stone. It was half buried near the mouth of the Nile River.

The Rosetta Stone, as it came to be called, was completely covered with writing. Carved into the stone were three languages: hieroglyphics, a second Egyptian language, and Greek. A French historian named Champollion translated the Greek portion first. Then he carefully compared this to the other languages. He realized that the same message was written in the three languages. He was finally able to learn the meaning of the hieroglyphics. In 1822 he published the results of his work.

Champollion had developed a system of sounds and meanings that could be applied to other hieroglyphics. For the first time, scholars could go into an Egyptian tomb or temple and read the name of a king and something about him. Suddenly, with hard work, a skilled translator could read a papyrus roll that had not been read for thousands of years.

Today, the Rosetta Stone is in the British Museum, in London, England. Many visitors come to see the black stone that provided the key to understanding ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics.



*The Rosetta Stone has the same message written in three languages.*