

1.1

The Geography of Ancient Egypt



"Hail to thee, O Nile! Who manifests thyself over this land and comes to give life to Egypt!" These words written 4,000 years ago emphasize the importance of the Nile River to Egyptians: No Nile, no life, no Egypt. It was that simple.

MAIN IDEA

The Nile was the source of life in Egypt's dry, barren deserts.



Critical Viewing This photo shows the fertile land alongside the Nile River. How does it illustrate the way Egyptians depended on the Nile?

mt THE GIFT OF THE NILE

The **Nile River** was central to the civilization that developed in Egypt. At around 4,132 miles in length, it is the world's longest river. It flows northward from sources deep in Africa to the Mediterranean Sea. Six **cataracts**, rock formations that create churning rapids, break the river's smooth course. The 550 miles from the most northerly cataract to the Mediterranean Sea formed ancient Egypt's heartland, which was divided into two distinct regions: the Upper (southern) Nile and the Lower (northern) Nile. The Lower Nile region included the Nile Delta, next to the Mediterranean. A **delta** is an area where a river fans out into various branches as it flows into a body of water.

The Nile was generally a peaceful river. Its current carried ships gently downstream, while the winds above it usually blew upstream, making it easy for ships to row downstream or sail upstream.

Water was the Nile's greatest gift. Without it there could be no agriculture in Egypt's desert. Every year faraway rains sent a surge of water downstream to Egypt, swelling the river with the annual flood.

Unlike the rivers of Mesopotamia, the Nile's flood was predictable, occurring every summer. The waters spilled over the riverbanks, depositing another great gift: silt, or very fine particles carried from upriver. The silt-enriched soil was fertile, or full of nutrients to support abundant crops. This soil made agriculture extremely productive—a key to the development of Egyptian civilization. With good management and a little luck, the soil delivered huge harvests.

THE BLACK LAND AND THE RED LAND mt

Egypt's climate was consistently dry, and sunshine was plentiful. Seven months of hot, sunny weather were followed by a

winter of mild, sunny weather. The lack of rainfall created a landscape of striking contrast, made up of regions called the "black land" and the "red land."

The black land was the narrow stretch that ran along both sides of the Nile. There, the river's waters and nourishing dark silt allowed plants to grow and people to live.

The red land was a vast, scorching desert that surrounded the Nile. This desert formed a powerful barrier against invasion and helped separate Egypt from the world beyond. The seemingly empty desert also held a

treasure trove of raw materials, including stone for building and gold. The only major resource Egypt lacked was timber.

Egypt's geography, its climate, and—above all—the Nile River all played parts in the kind of civilization that Egypt would become. The land was rich in resources, produced a huge food surplus, and had well-protected borders. In addition, Egypt was a crossroads for trade, lying along important trade routes connecting Africa, the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, and the Middle East. The scene was set for Africa's most famous civilization of ancient times.

REVIEW & ASSESS

- 1. READING CHECK** Why was the Nile River essential to life in ancient Egypt?
- 2. ANALYZE CAUSE AND EFFECT** What effect did the annual flooding of the Nile River have on the development of agriculture in Egypt?
- 3. COMPARE AND CONTRAST** What did the black and red lands have in common? How were they different?

1.2

Agriculture Develops



It's August, and all that can be seen of the flooded fields is water lapping at the

stones marking each farmer's boundary. In the dark of night, a farmer paddles nervously out and shifts the stones to steal a few feet from his neighbor. It's a profitable but serious crime—the penalty is death. Farmland in Egypt is so valuable that some are willing to risk it.

MAIN IDEA

Agriculture encouraged the development of communities and kingdoms in Egypt.

mt THE FERTILE NILE DELTA

Five thousand years ago, the lives of most Egyptians revolved around farming. Along with raising livestock, Egyptians grew a wide variety of crops such as wheat, barley, beans, lentils, peas, onions, and leeks. Fruits included grapes, dates, figs, and watermelons. Farmers grew flax to make cloth. Fish and birds were plentiful, and even poor Egyptians could eat well.

The cycles of the river dictated the farming year. From July to October, the fields were flooded, so farmers did other work. When the floods receded, farmers plowed the soft ground, scattered seeds, and used animals to trample the seeds into the soil. The growing crops were carefully watered through irrigation. Farmers captured

floodwater in artificial lakes and channeled it to the fields. Later, the shaduf (shuh-DOOF) made irrigation easier. This tool was a long pole with a bucket on one end and a weight on the other. Farmers could use a shaduf to effortlessly lift water to their fields. The grain harvest started in mid-March. During the hot summer that followed, farmers prepared their fields before the next flood.

Irrigation and the Nile's fertile soil allowed for extremely productive farming. As in Mesopotamia, successful farming generated surpluses, which led to population growth, trade, and specialized jobs. Building and maintaining irrigation networks took a lot of labor, so farmers grouped together to create larger communities. Leadership was needed to coordinate and manage these increasingly complex societies. As villages grew into towns, village chiefs became kings.

TWO KINGDOMS ARISE mt

Some historians believe that by around 3200 B.C., two kings ruled over two separate kingdoms—**Upper Egypt** and **Lower Egypt**. Lower Egypt was the Nile Delta region with its wide expanse of fertile land and access to the Mediterranean Sea. Upper Egypt was the long, narrow stretch of the Nile south of modern Cairo and hemmed in by desert.

The Nile served as a superhighway, encouraging contact between Upper and Lower Egypt. Movement along the Nile was easy, and all the villages and towns were located near the great river. Goods and ideas were traded freely between the kingdoms, unifying Egyptians economically and culturally. Unlike Mesopotamia, Egypt would come to be a strong, unified state rather than a group of city-states.

However, Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt remained proudly distinct. Even after Egypt was united, it was represented by a double crown. Every time Egypt descended into disorder, the two kingdoms were usually on opposite sides of the power struggle.



REVIEW & ASSESS

- 1. READING CHECK** What role did the Nile play in Egypt's early development?
- 2. DESCRIBE** What techniques did ancient Egyptian farmers use to make their farming more productive?
- 3. INTERPRET MAPS** How does this map highlight the effect of the Nile River on agriculture?

1.3 Egypt Unites



Egypt's ancient civilization was unified for close to 3,000 years—twelve times as long as the United States has been a country. Of course, ancient Egypt witnessed its share of good rulers and good times and bad rulers and bad times. Still, ancient Egypt will be long remembered for its wealth and power.

MAIN IDEA

Strong kings united Egypt and ruled with the authority of gods.

mt DYNASTIES BEGIN

Egypt was governed by a long series of strong rulers. Exactly how Egypt united under a single ruler is uncertain. Tradition says that around 3100 B.C., the king of Upper Egypt conquered Lower Egypt and became ruler of all Egypt. Historians believe this king was called **Menes** (MEH-nehz). The complete unification of Egypt was probably a process that took place over the reigns of the kings who followed Menes. A double crown that combined the white crown of Upper Egypt with the red crown of Lower Egypt symbolized the newly unified country.

During this early period, the Egyptians built a magnificent new capital city at Memphis (MEHM-fihz). They also established the foundations of Egypt's political, economic, technological, artistic, and religious practices. The first kings founded a ruling **dynasty**

(DY-nuh-see)—a series of rulers from the same family. Egypt had 31 dynasties and was ruled by a total of more than 330 kings.

PHARAOHS RULE mt

Even though Egyptians did not call their kings **pharaoh** (FEHR-oh) until after 1000 B.C., the title is generally used for all Egyptian kings. The people used the term because they were afraid to speak the king's name. Why did the pharaoh inspire such fear in his subjects? He had complete authority over all religious, civil, and military matters. He exercised absolute power of life and death over everyone. A pharaoh was more than a man; he was worshipped as the son of Egypt's gods and a living god himself.

In Egypt, religion and government strongly overlapped. The pharaoh's main religious role was to keep harmony by maintaining communication between Egypt's people and their gods. He was high priest of every temple and led the most important ceremonies, especially the New Year rituals to ensure bountiful harvests. With this godly role came risk. Success reinforced the pharaoh's power. Defeat, disease, or famine threatened his authority.

On the government side, the pharaoh dictated all the important decisions. He also led his armies into battle as commander-in-chief. However, much of his day-to-day work was actually done by his **viziers** (vuh-ZEERZ), or chief officials. At first each pharaoh had one vizier. Later pharaohs had two viziers—one ran Upper Egypt and the other ran Lower Egypt. Thousands of lesser officials supported the viziers.

Most pharaohs were men and had many wives. Commonly, the eldest son of the pharaoh's principal wife inherited the throne. He often ruled alongside his father, learning on the job and ensuring a smooth succession (the passing of the throne to the next ruler) when the pharaoh died.



Critical Viewing This carving shows a pharaoh wearing the double crown of Egypt. Why was it important for the pharaohs to wear the double crown?

REVIEW & ASSESS

- 1. READING CHECK** What made the pharaohs of ancient Egypt so strong and powerful?
- 2. DRAW CONCLUSIONS** Why would disease or famine threaten the pharaoh's authority over the people?
- 3. ANALYZE LANGUAGE USE** Why does the text refer to Egypt's rulers as *strong*?

2.1 The Old Kingdom



It is taller than the Statue of Liberty, twice the area of the U.S. Capitol building, double the volume of the Rose Bowl Stadium, and 4,500 years older than all of them. For thousands of years, the Great Pyramid of Khufu was the largest structure on the planet.

MAIN IDEA

Old Kingdom pharaohs demonstrated their power by building monumental pyramids.



The great pyramids of Giza dwarf the human figures nearby. These imposing structures would have awed the average Egyptian in ancient times, just as they amaze visitors today.

mt PYRAMIDS ALONG THE NILE

The **Old Kingdom** was Egypt's first great period of unity and prosperity, lasting from around 2700 B.C. to 2200 B.C. During these centuries, Egypt prospered under effective pharaohs, a strong central government, and an efficient administration. As Egyptian power grew, trade, technology, building, writing, and art also flourished. The pharaohs used their enormous wealth and power to build the **pyramids** (PEER-uh-mihdz), massive monumental tombs to house their dead bodies. The pyramids represented the Egyptian belief that life is a passageway to the afterlife, an existence believed to follow death. As a result, people made careful preparations for death.

Egyptian kings were originally buried beneath low mud-brick buildings. Around 2650 B.C., King Djoser (JOH-sur) took this idea to

the next level—literally. Djoser's talented vizier, Imhotep (ihm-HOH-tehp), designed a 200-foot-high tomb made of giant steps. Beneath this step pyramid was a maze of chambers packed with items for the pharaoh's spirit to use in the afterlife. A huge complex of buildings and temples surrounded the step pyramid, creating a palace where the king's spirit could live in luxury for eternity.

THE GREAT PYRAMID mt

In Giza (GEE-zuh), near Cairo, the Great Pyramid of **Khufu** (KOO-foo) dominates the skyline. It is so extraordinarily huge that historians once assumed Khufu had been a cruel tyrant who used brutal methods to build it. In fact, he probably employed farmers unable to farm during the annual floods. Even so, Khufu must have commanded exceptional power and wealth to build his Great Pyramid.

The pyramids were an impressive achievement for a civilization with limited technology. Using copper tools, ropes, sleds, and ramps, some 18,000 workers quarried, cut, and precisely placed 2.3 million two-and-a-half-ton limestone and granite blocks. It took 20 years. The pyramid they built was symmetrical—all sides were the same. It covered 571,158 square feet and stood 481 feet high. Deep inside were Khufu's tomb and treasure. Two other large pyramids were built in Giza by Khufu's successors, Menkaure (mehn-KO-ray) and Khafre (KAH-fray). Khafre also built the Great Sphinx (sfihns),

a symbol of divine power with a lion's body and Khafre's head. The sphinx was carved out of a huge piece of limestone.

The Great Pyramid was a powerful symbol of the pharaoh's status as a living god and the unity of religion and government in Egypt. A proper burial within the great tomb would ensure the pharaoh's smooth passage to life after death. Until then, a vast city of pyramid builders surrounded Giza. Here, too, were palaces and government buildings that allowed the pharaoh to run the country while building his home for the afterlife.

REVIEW & ASSESS

- 1. **READING CHECK** Why did Old Kingdom pharaohs build pyramids?
- 2. **DESCRIBE** What was new and different about the design of King Djoser's burial building?
- 3. **DRAW CONCLUSIONS** What do the pyramids reveal about Egyptian society?

2.2 Daily Life and Religion



There's a saying that "you can't take it with you" when you die. But Egyptians did! In fact, they were buried with everything they might need in the afterlife. The graves of wealthy Egyptians contained food, furniture, and jewelry. The Egyptians were ready for anything.

MAIN IDEA

The Egyptians had strong beliefs about religion and burial that affected all social classes.

Eight Gods of Ancient Egypt

Horus Sky god

Hathor Goddess of love, birth, and death

Re God of the sun (sometimes called Ra)

Nut Sky goddess

Anubis God of the dead

Osiris God of agriculture and judge of the dead

Isis Wife of Osiris and mother of Horus

Thoth God of writing, counting, and wisdom

EGYPTIAN SOCIETY

Ancient Egypt's society was a **hierarchy** (HY-rar-kee), meaning that people belonged to different social classes and each class had a rank in society. The social structure resembled Egypt's pyramids. At the top was the pharaoh, the all-powerful ruler and living god.

Beneath the pharaoh came the priests and nobles who ran the country and army. At the next step in the pyramid were all the officials and scribes who kept the government running smoothly by collecting taxes, organizing building projects, and keeping records. Beneath the officials and scribes were craftsmen and merchants. Farmers formed the next layer, and at the bottom

came unskilled laborers and slaves who did all the hardest work.

Unlike in Mesopotamia, Egyptian women shared some rights with men. They could own property, conduct business, and take part in court cases. Poorer women often worked alongside their husbands, but they could do almost any job. Still, a woman's main role was to be a wife and raise children.

EGYPTIAN GODS

Like the people of Mesopotamia, the Egyptians believed in multiple gods. Modern scholars know 1,500 of them by name. The Egyptians believed that the gods controlled every aspect of life and death. The most important god was **Re** (RAY), the sun god, who created the world. The Egyptians also worshipped Osiris (oh-SY-rihs), the god of the underworld. The god Anubis (uh-NOO-bihs) weighed each dead person's heart against the weight of an ostrich feather. If the person was good, his or her heart would weigh the same as the feather, and the person would be admitted to the afterlife.

These beliefs encouraged Egyptians to lead good lives and take burial seriously. They believed a dead person's spirit needed food and a body to live in. The spirit would need to recognize the body after death. That is why the bodies of pharaohs and other powerful people were preserved as **mummies**. Specialized workers removed and preserved the internal organs (except for the heart, which Anubis had to weigh). Then the workers dried out the body and wrapped it in linen. Last, the body was placed in a coffin, and priests performed special rituals that were intended to give life to the mummy.



Critical Viewing The jackal-headed god Anubis often appears on tomb walls. Why did Egyptians paint this god on their tombs?

REVIEW & ASSESS

- 1. READING CHECK** How was Egyptian society organized?
- 2. COMPARE** How were the ancient Egyptians' religious beliefs similar to those of the people of Mesopotamia?
- 3. DRAW CONCLUSIONS** How did religion affect daily life in ancient Egypt?

2.4

The Middle Kingdom



First comes the thunder of hooves, then the whistling of arrows. Through the dust of battle bursts a line of horse-drawn chariots. From these wheeled wooden platforms, enemy archers rain arrows into your ranks before crashing through them, scattering your Egyptian army. These foreign war machines are effective; it's time to adopt, adapt, and fight back.

MAIN IDEA

The Middle Kingdom was strong and peaceful between periods of weakness and foreign rule.

mt CONFLICT AND STABILITY

The peace and prosperity of the Old Kingdom gave way to chaos and war between rival Egyptian groups around 2200 b.c. Building monumental tombs had drained the royal treasury. Water shortages and famines made the people doubt the pharaoh's power as a living god. The kingdom descended into a long period of conflict within its borders.

Then, around 2040 b.c., a king named Mentuhotep II (mehn-too-HOH-tehp) reunited the kingdom and launched a new era of peace and prosperity known as the **Middle Kingdom**. This period lasted until about 1650 b.c. During the Middle

Kingdom, the pharaohs restored the power of the centralized government. Farmers expanded agriculture into new regions, and the building of great monuments, including pyramids, resumed.

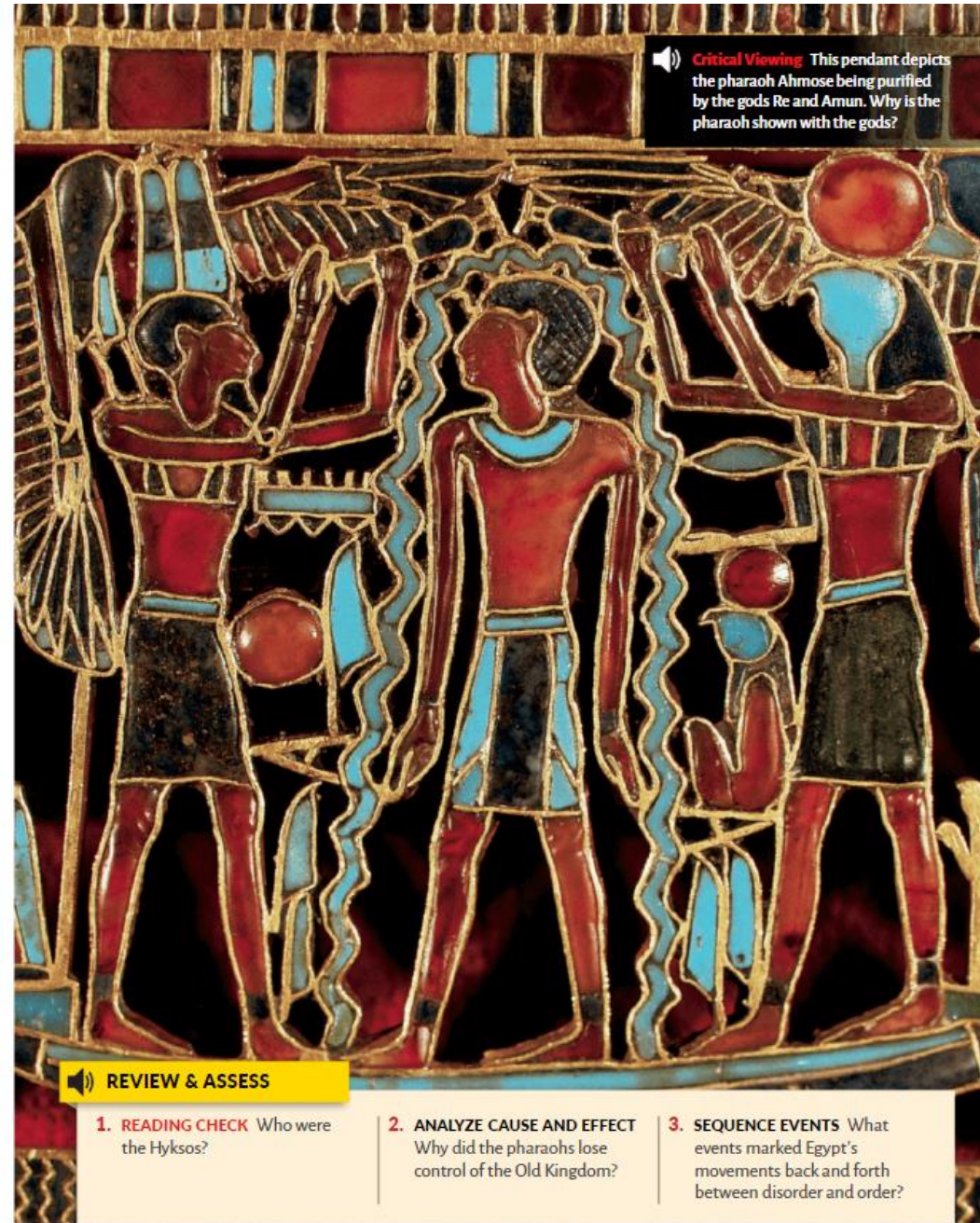
The pharaohs also pursued an active foreign policy to increase Egypt's wealth. Trade expanded greatly. Egypt's trade network reached to several nearby lands and possibly as far as East Africa. To support and expand the prosperity of the Middle Kingdom, the pharaohs increased Egypt's military power. In the northeast, they conquered lands along the eastern Mediterranean. They also extended Egypt's southern border further up the Nile by leading successful military campaigns against the kingdoms of Nubia (NOO-bee-uh).

INVADERS mt

Egypt's wealth made a tempting target. One group of foreigners, the **Hyksos** (HIHK-sohs), came to live in Egypt and rose to power in Lower Egypt. The Hyksos brought an end to the Middle Kingdom.

Hyksos means "rulers of foreign lands," and, from their capital Avaris (AH-var-ihs) in the Nile Delta, they controlled much of Egypt for more than 100 years. The Hyksos probably ruled pretty much as the pharaohs had, adopting native ways and practices. Even so, native Egyptians resented being under foreign rule. Finally, in Upper Egypt, King **Ahmosé** (AH-mohz) rebelled. The Hyksos brought to the battlefield deadly new tools including horse-drawn chariots, powerful new bows, curved swords, and body armor. Ahmosé adopted these deadly weapons and threw the invaders out of Egypt.

Although Ahmosé reunited Egypt under native Egyptian rule, he faced new challenges. Egypt had been largely on its own for centuries, but now the pharaohs had to deal with the wider world. Armed with their new military might, the pharaohs set out to forge an empire.



Critical Viewing This pendant depicts the pharaoh Ahmosé being purified by the gods Re and Amun. Why is the pharaoh shown with the gods?

REVIEW & ASSESS

- 1. READING CHECK** Who were the Hyksos?
- 2. ANALYZE CAUSE AND EFFECT** Why did the pharaohs lose control of the Old Kingdom?
- 3. SEQUENCE EVENTS** What events marked Egypt's movements back and forth between disorder and order?