

EGYPT

Ancient Egypt -- a land of mysteries. No other civilization has so captured the imagination of scholars and laypeople alike. Mystery surrounds its origins, its religion and its monumental architecture: colossal temples, pyramids and the enormous Sphinx. The Egyptian pyramids are the most famous of all the ancient monuments, the only remaining wonder of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

GEOGRAPHY

Just as life arose from the waters of the primeval sea, so the waters of the [Nile](#) gave birth to the pharaonic kingdom. A gift to the people of Egypt, the longest river in the world flows north from the heart of Africa to the Mediterranean Sea. Its [flood plain](#) was an extensive oasis, a magnet for life -- human, plant and animal. Humans were drawn there because they could grow crops and settle into permanent villages. The annual flooding of the Nile deposited nutrient rich silt on the land, creating all the ingredients needed to support life and the growth of a great civilization.

Bounded on the south, east and west by an impenetrable desert, and on the north by the sea, ancient Egypt was protected from outside influences, which allowed it to evolve in its own unique way.

TIME

The pharaonic period spans over 3,000 years, beginning when [kings](#) first ruled Egypt. The [first dynasty](#) started in 3000 B.C. with the reign of King [Narmer](#). Throughout the centuries, the power of the pharaohs increased and decreased numerous times before Egypt came under Roman rule in the Graeco-Roman Period (332 B.C. - A.D. 395). The pharaonic period ended with the death of the last [Cleopatra](#) during the thirty-second dynasty. When the Roman Empire was divided in A.D. 395, [Egypt was controlled from Byzantium](#) until the [Arab conquest](#) in A.D. 641.

DAILY LIFE

FOOD

Each summer, starting in July, the Nile River rose, flooding the low-lying plains on either side. Swollen by the monsoon rains of Ethiopia, it deposited a layer of black soil over the land, rich in nutrients needed for growing crops. The river rose about 8 metres (27 feet) on average. If it rose 2.5 metres (8 feet) higher or lower, disaster struck. When it rose too high, villages were flooded, causing extensive damage and loss of life. When it did not rise high enough, the fields did not receive sufficient nutrients and moisture to support the crops, which resulted in famine. Livestock was important to the Egyptian economy, supplying meat, milk, hides, and dung for cooking fuel.

shelter

Most houses were made of brick. The banks of the Nile provided the mud used to make bricks. Egyptian peasants would have lived in simple mud-brick homes containing only a few pieces of furniture: beds, stools, boxes and low tables. Craftworkers lived in one- or two-storey flat-roofed dwellings made of mud bricks. The walls and roof would have been covered with plaster and painted. Inside, there was a reception room, a living room, bedrooms and a cellar in which food and beverages were stored. Food was prepared in an outdoor kitchen equipped with a mud-brick oven. Stairs on the exterior of the house led to a roof-top terrace.

The [homes of the wealthy](#) were larger and more luxurious. Spacious reception and living rooms opened onto a central garden courtyard with a fish pond and flowering plants. Each bedroom had a private bathroom, and the walls, columns and ceilings were painted with beautiful designs inspired by nature. Elaborate and highly decorated furniture included beds, chairs, boxes and tables. Painted clay pots and vessels, as well as alabaster bowls and jars, were also found in the homes of the nobles.

CLOTHING

The ancient Egyptians were very particular about cleanliness and personal appearance. People who were poorly groomed were considered inferior. Both men and women used cosmetics and wore jewellery. One item of jewellery, the amulet, was believed to protect the owners and give them strength.

Flax grown by farmers was [woven into fine linen](#) for clothing. Working-class men wore loincloths or short kilts, as well as long shirt-like garments tied with a sash at the waist. Kilts were made from a rectangular piece of linen that was folded around the body and tied at the waist. Wealthy men wore knee-length shirts, loincloths or kilts and adorned themselves with jewellery – a string of beads, armlets and bracelets. Working-class women wore full-length wraparound gowns and close-fitting sheaths. Elite women enhanced their appearance with make-up, earrings, bracelets and necklaces.

The Egyptians used mineral pigments to produce make-up



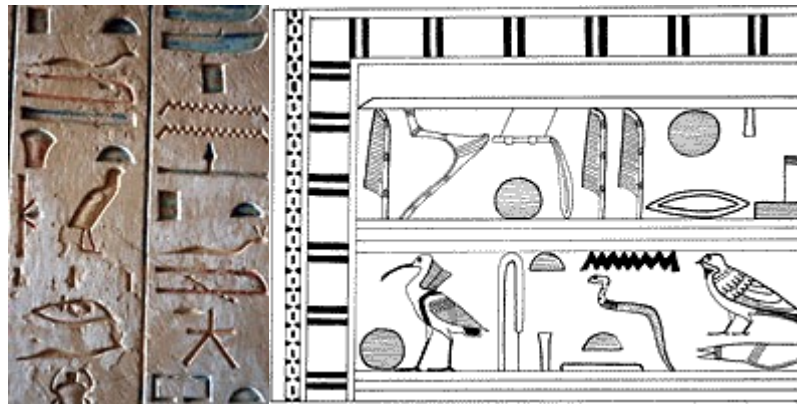
From the earliest times, [jewellery](#) was worn by the elite for self-adornment and as an indication of social status. Bracelets, rings, earrings, necklaces, pins, belt buckles and amulets were made from gold and silver inlaid with precious stones such as lapis lazuli, turquoise, carnelian and amethyst. Faience and glass were also used to decorate pieces of jewellery.

WRITING

The [Egyptian language](#) was one of the earliest languages to be written down, perhaps only the [Sumerian language](#) is older. First appearing on stone and pottery dating from 3100 B.C. to 3000 B.C., it remained in use for almost 3,000 years; the last inscription was written in A.D. 394.






















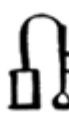


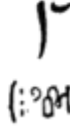
The word *hieroglyph* literally means "sacred carvings". The Egyptians first used [hieroglyphs](#) exclusively for inscriptions carved or painted on temple walls. This form of pictorial writing was also used on [tombs](#), sheets of [papyrus](#), wooden boards covered with a stucco wash, potsherds and fragments of limestone.



Hieroglyphics are an original [form of writing](#) out of which all other forms have evolved. Two of the newer forms were called hieratic and demotic. [Hieratic](#) was a simplified form of hieroglyphics used for administrative and business purposes, as well as for literary, scientific and religious texts. Demotic, a Greek word meaning "popular script", was in general use for the daily requirements of the society. In the third century A.D., hieroglyphic writing began to be replaced by Coptic, a form of Greek writing. The last hieroglyphic text was written at the Temple of Philae in A.D. 450. The spoken Egyptian language was superseded by Arabic in the Middle Ages.

Hieroglyphs and their cursive equivalents

Taken from: G. Steindorff and K. Seele, *When Egypt Ruled the East*, Chicago: 1942, p.122

Hieroglyphic		Hieroglyphic Book Hand	Hieratic		Demotic
					
					
					
					
2700-2600 B.C.	ca. 1500 B.C.	ca. 1500 B.C.	ca. 1900 B.C.	ca. 200 B.C.	400-100 B.C.



It was not until the nineteenth century that Egyptian [hieroglyphs were deciphered](#). Several people had been trying to crack the code when the brilliant young Frenchman, [Jean-François Champollion](#) discovered [the secret](#) to this ancient writing. A decree issued at Memphis, Egypt, on March 27, 196 B.C. was inscribed on the [Rosetta Stone](#) in three scripts: hieroglyphics, demotic and Greek. After Thomas Young deciphered the demotic text, Champollion used the information to break the code of the hieroglyphic text in 1822. In 1828, he published the famous "*Précis*" that marked the first real breakthrough in reading hieroglyphs.



Hieroglyphs are written in columns or in horizontal lines. They are generally [read from right to left](#) and from top to bottom. Sometimes, the script is read from left to right. The reader can determine the orientation by looking at the animal and human figures -- they face towards the beginning of the text. For example: if a figure faces right, the text should be read from right to left.

Words and names written in hieroglyphs were believed to have magical powers. For this reason, funeral texts and the names of the deceased were written on coffins and tomb walls. This meant that the gods would hear the prayers and the individuals would be protected from harm. A name written in hieroglyphs embodied a person's identity. If it was obliterated, the person's identity was lost, along with his or her means to continue living in the afterworld. The names of pharaohs such as [Tutankhamun](#) and Queen [Hatshepsut](#), for example, were removed from temple walls by

their

successors.

RELIGION

One of the most interesting aspects of ancient Egypt is its religion. The depth of Egyptian thinking and the rich imagination displayed in the creation of ideas and images of the [gods and goddesses](#) are beyond compare. In elaborating their [beliefs](#), the Egyptians were working on the cosmic plane, searching for an understanding of the most basic laws of the universe.

When the Greeks and the Romans conquered Egypt, [their religion](#) was influenced by that of Egypt. Ancient pagan beliefs gradually faded and were replaced by monotheistic religions. Today, the majority of the [Egyptian population](#) is Muslim, with a small minority of Jews and Christians.

Amun Re-a form of the sun god

[Bes](#) is a protector of the family and is associated with sexuality and childbirth. OSIRIS presided over the court that determined the fate of kings when they died.

HORUS means "he who is above"

ANUBIS [presided over the embalming process](#) and [accompanied dead kings](#) in the afterworld.

MUMMYFICATION

The [practice of mummification](#) began in Egypt in 2400 B.C. and continued into the [Graeco-Roman Period](#). During the [Old Kingdom](#), it was believed that only pharaohs could attain immortality. Around 2000 B.C., attitudes changed, however: everyone could live in the afterworld as long as the body was mummified and the proper elements were placed in the tomb. But since mummification was expensive, only the wealthy were able to take advantage of it. Although mummification was not a strict requirement for resurrection in the next world, it was certainly regarded as a highly desirable means of attaining it. The prayers in the *Book of the Dead* were intended to help the deceased make a successful transition to the afterlife.



Materials used in mummification:

1. linen



Mummification

Brain

tools:

hooks

2.	sawdust	(replicas based on examples from the Rijksmuseum, Leiden)
3.	lichen	Oil jar (Royal Ontario Museum 948.1.17)
4.	beeswax	Funnel (replica)
5.	resin	Embalmer's knife
6.	natron	
7.	onion	
8.	Nile mud	
9.	linen pads	
10.	frankincense	

This practice reached its height during the eleventh and twelfth centuries B.C. in Thebes, where the present-day cities of Luxor and Karnak are located. The purpose of mummification was to keep the body intact so it could be transported to a spiritual [afterlife](#).

ARCHITECTURE

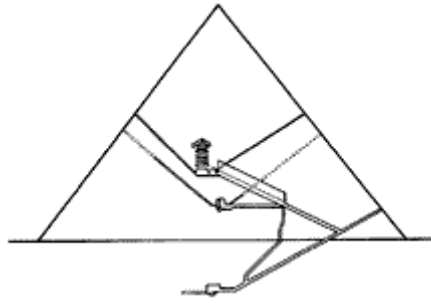
The ancient Egyptians built their pyramids, tombs, temples and palaces out of stone, the most durable of all building materials. Although earthquakes, wars and the forces of nature have taken their toll, the remains of Egypt's monumental architectural achievements are visible across the land, a tribute to the greatness of this civilization. These building projects took a high degree of architectural and engineering skill, and the organization of a large workforce consisting of highly trained craftsmen and labourers.



Apart from the pyramids, Egyptian buildings were decorated with paintings, carved stone images, [hieroglyphs](#) and three-dimensional statues. The art tells the story of the pharaohs, the gods, the common people and the natural world of plants, birds and animals. The beauty and grandeur of these sites are beyond compare. How the ancient Egyptians were able to construct these massive structures using primitive tools is still a mystery.

PYRAMIDS

A pyramid is a tomb, a four-sided stone structure that symbolizes the sacred mountain, humanity's universal striving to reach the heavens. The ancient belief in raising the human spirit towards the gods is the quintessential purpose behind the construction of pyramids. The Egyptians left thousands of illustrations depicting daily life in the Old Kingdom. Curiously enough, none of them show how pyramids were built.



The king's burial chamber is located in the middle of the pyramid, high above ground, and a series of relieving chambers were built above it to prevent it from collapsing.

The Great Sphinx at Giza, near Cairo, is probably the most famous sculpture in the world. With a lion's body and a human head, it represents [Ra-Horakhty](#), a form of the powerful sun god, and is the incarnation of royal power and the protector of the temple doors. The Sphinx is the oldest and longest stone sculpture from the [Old Kingdom](#).

TEMPLES

Over a long period of time, the Egyptians built numerous [temples along the Nile](#). Two of the most famous are [Karnak](#) and [Luxor](#). These impressive structures, with their huge columned halls and [pylon gateways](#), were built to honour the dead and venerate local and national gods.

PALACES

Palaces were the residences of the [pharaohs](#) and their entourage. They consisted of a complex of buildings designed to house the headquarters of power and the temples for worshipping the gods. There were two main sections, one to accommodate the needs of the pharaoh and the other to meet the requirements of administration. Palaces took on a distinctive architectural form around the end of the fourth millennium B.C., a form that was repeated for most of the third millennium. They were essentially rectangular structures consisting of high walls topped with towers. The tops of the towers were often decorated with a rich cornice or panels.