

*Teacher Resource Guide:*

# ANCIENT EGYPT



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*Introduction*

## THE KELSEY MUSEUM

### **Introduction**

Thank you for downloading this Teacher Resource Guide on ancient Egypt from the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology. We hope you find the information and activities helpful in planning your lessons. This guide is designed with Michigan 6th and 7th Grade Social Studies Content Standards in mind and you will find the covered standards at the beginning of the background information section. However, we encourage teachers outside of Michigan to utilize this resource in their classroom planning as well. We would love to see your class in the galleries and recommend a field trip program that includes a gallery tour and activities. Field trips are a great way to kick off or wrap up your ancient Egypt unit.

### **The Kelsey Museum of Archaeology**

The Kelsey Museum of Archaeology at the University of Michigan supports teaching and research on Classical, Egyptian, and Middle Eastern archaeology through stewardship of its rich collections, an active exhibitions program, and sponsorship of ongoing field research. The Kelsey houses a collection of more than 100,000 artifacts, of which approximately 1,500 are on permanent display. Our collection covers the geographic regions of ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia and Iran, Greece, and the Roman Empire.

The museum's founder, Francis Willey Kelsey, pursued an active program of collecting antiquities for use in teaching. In 1924 he launched the first University of Michigan–sponsored archaeological excavations at sites in the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern regions. Most of the artifacts in the Kelsey Museum come from campaigns carried out in Egypt and Iraq in the 1920s and 1930s. In addition to conserving and exhibiting its collections, the Kelsey still sponsors field projects in countries around the Mediterranean, although the artifacts recovered in those excavations now all remain in their countries of origin.



The Kelsey Museum's Newberry Hall.



The William E. Upjohn Wing of the Kelsey Museum.

# HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE GUIDE

This guide is designed to be paired with the Michigan Standards and consists of three parts: background information, suggested activities, and additional resources. The background sections cover the following topics:

- Geography
- History
- Government and Social Structures
- Daily Life
- Religion and the Pantheon
- Mortuary Practices and the Afterlife
- Writing
- Art

The background sections contain important information about ancient Egypt. They are a solid foundation upon which to build your lesson plans. They are not lesson plans themselves.

Within the background information you will find sidebars labeled **Important Terms**, **Think Like an Archaeologist**, **Did You Know?**, and **Artifact Exploration**.



## Important Terms

Words listed in the Important Terms boxes are vital to the understanding of ancient Egyptian history and culture.



## Think Like an Archaeologist

The study of ancient Egyptian history and culture is part of the larger Ancient History requirements in the State of Michigan. The traditional curriculum resources ask students to “think like a historian,” asking guided inquiry questions such as, How do historians know and construct theories, perspectives, and accounts of the past? The “Think Like an Archaeologist” sidebars offer opportunities to expand these types of inquiry questions and to have students walk step-by-step through the process that archaeologists go through when approaching their own research questions.



## Did You Know?

These sidebars include supplemental information about artifacts, people, and topics within the background information.

In addition, we have created five brief Artifact Exploration videos that you can play in your classroom. These videos are available on the Kelsey Museum YouTube channel and each one introduces a topic in this curriculum. The Artifact Exploration icon  indicates that there is a video relating to the associated content.

Within the background information you will also find suggestions for classroom activities. These are separate from the activities that are included in the second section of this packet. The classroom activities are suggestions for how to talk to your students and get them to engage with the material. The activities at the end of this guide are great options for homework assignments and classroom projects.

The final section of this packet contains additional resources. These include printable blank area maps and worksheets for use in your classroom and images of artifacts from the Kelsey Museum that relate directly to the background information. These images can be printed and displayed, or used digitally for close looking and observation of the artifacts.

### **What is archaeology and what do archaeologists do?**

If we are going to be thinking like archaeologists, then we had better start with what archaeology is. Imagine that you had to explain how you live to a visitor from the future, but without speaking or writing. How would you tell them what you do every day, what you eat, where you live?

Archaeology is the study of things that people made, used, and left behind. The goal of archaeology is to understand what people of the past were like and how they lived. Scientists who study archaeology are called archaeologists.

An archaeologist's work begins with finding a site to study. Some archaeological sites are visible on the surface of the land. Other sites are buried deep beneath the ground.

After finding a site, an archaeologist digs slowly and carefully. This work is called excavation, or a "dig." Archaeologists use a variety of tools to uncover buildings and "artifacts." An artifact is an object that has been made or changed by people. A rock is not an artifact. A rock with writing, or sculpture made from that rock, is an artifact.

Archaeologists are like detectives. They collect evidence (data) and analyze it to draw a picture of the past and the people who lived then.

Archaeology is a science. Archaeologists make hypotheses, test their theories, and support them with more evidence. Excavating is just the first step to doing archaeology. Much of archaeology actually happens away from the field, in a laboratory. Archaeologists have to study chemistry, geology, biology, mathematics, and art, just to name a few subjects!

# THE GEOGRAPHY OF EGYPT



## BACKGROUND

Geography played a significant role in the development of Egypt's ancient civilization. Located at the northeast corner of Africa, the land of Egypt is bounded by the Mediterranean and Red Seas, deserts to the east and west, and the rocky **cataracts** along the **Nile River**. These natural boundaries provided defensible borders that protected Egypt from overland incursions, yet Egypt's location at the intersection of Africa and Asia, and access to two seas, allowed for trade in multiple directions.

Ancient Egyptians called their land **Kmt**, meaning "Black Land," because of the dark, fertile soil produced by the annual Nile flood. The name "Egypt" comes from the Greek word Aegyptus, which may have been a mispronunciation of the Egyptian name for the city of Memphis, capital of Egypt during the Old Kingdom.



### IMPORTANT TERMS

- Cataract
- Nile River/Iteru
- Kmt
- Inundation
- Upper Egypt
- Lower Egypt
- Gezira
- Oasis
- Wadi

## THE GEOGRAPHIC REGIONS OF EGYPT

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### The Nile

The ancient Egyptians called the Nile simply **Iteru**, “the River.” Flowing 4,132 miles from sources south of Egypt in the mountains of Uganda (Lake Victoria) and Ethiopia (Lake Tana), the Nile brings fresh water and fertile silt on its way north to the Mediterranean Sea. The rich soils deposited on fields along the river’s course create an agricultural oasis in an otherwise desert landscape.

In ancient times, the Nile went through an annual cycle of **inundation**, or flooding, which began with torrential spring rains in the Ethiopian highlands. The influx of water reached Egypt beginning in late June, breaching the banks of the Nile and filling irrigation canals and reservoirs, where it was stored for later use. Floodwaters reached their peak in July–September and abated in October, leaving black silt that renewed the nutrients of agricultural soils. This silt was also used for making ceramics as well as mudbricks, the primary construction material for most buildings.

The annual flooding created a convex floodplain. The high ground close to the river sloped gradually away toward the desert. Villages and agricultural activities flourished in this fertile valley, but during seasons of drought, agricultural land reverted quickly to desert.

The Nile determined many aspects of life in ancient Egypt, even the conception of cardinal directions. The source of the Nile was in the south, which was considered the head of the country. Therefore this southern region was known as **Upper Egypt**, while the northern region, where the Nile ended, was known as **Lower Egypt**. Cairo and the head of the delta were considered the boundary between these two regions. The Mediterranean Sea was Lower Egypt’s northern border, while the First Cataract was the natural southern boundary of Upper Egypt.

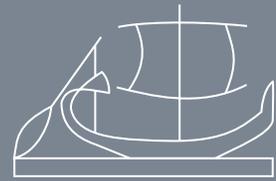
The Nile literally brought life and death to the ancient Egyptians. They relied on it for their drinking water and agricultural irrigation, but if it failed to flood to necessary levels in a given season, years of famine and drought could follow. It is therefore understandable that the Nile played a central role in the Egyptians’ understanding and interpretation of their world. The annual inundation represented a cycle of birth, death, and rebirth that was central to ancient Egyptian religious beliefs and practices. The Nile provided food and natural materials that shaped their daily lives. It inspired architectural designs, art, and even writing. We explore all these themes in future lessons.



#### DID YOU KNOW?

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Travel on the Nile was one of the easiest ways to get around. When heading north, boats utilized the river’s current. When heading south, they harnessed the wind using sails. But how do we know that? The hieroglyph for “going north” is a boat with no sail; “going south” is represented by a boat with a sail.



#### DID YOU KNOW?

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The Nile’s annual inundation determined the Egyptian calendar year, which was divided into three seasons: Flood (June–September/October), Growing (October–February), and Harvest (February–June). The New Year festival coincided with the first signs of flooding and the reappearance of the star Sothis (probably Sirius) in the sky.



The rich agricultural land of the Nile Valley.

## The Delta

The Nile Delta is a marshy area extending from just south of Cairo to the Mediterranean Sea. Today the delta is one of the most densely populated areas in Egypt. In antiquity, however, it contained more brackish water and large areas of infertile land, and was therefore less habitable. Nevertheless, the majority of the delta was naturally fertile due to the annual deposition of silt during the inundation, and during most of Egypt's history was one of its most important agricultural regions. In antiquity, the Nile north of Cairo spread out into many channels which, when seen from above, resembled a lotus flower, hence the name "delta," after the Greek letter of a similar shape. Today only two such channels remain. The land of the ancient delta was relatively flat with many lakes, marshes, lagoons, and sandy hills called **geziras** (literally "turtlebacks"). The geziras are where archaeologists have found most of the known Dynastic and Predynastic sites.



### Think Like an Archaeologist

If you were an archaeologist looking for ancient habitation sites in the delta, where would you look? Why do you think the geziras are where archaeologists find sites? These sandy hills are above the flood levels, and people could live on them year-round without worrying about their homes flooding. The sand that forms geziras also protects ancient artifacts against natural decay. Beginning around 6000 BCE, as the climate changed and the channels and marshes of the delta dried up, more people moved into the delta region and it became a significant center for agricultural activities.

## The Deserts

Egypt is characterized by the stark contrast between the lush abundance of the Nile and the harsh surrounding deserts. Both the eastern and western deserts have their own unique character and role in Egyptian culture. East and west represented birth and death respectively for the ancient Egyptians. This concept even dictated settlement and building patterns along the Nile. While villages tended to populate the eastern banks, cemeteries such as those at Abydos and the Valley of the Kings, and funerary temple complexes like those at Deir el-Medina, occupied the west banks. That is not to say that people did not live in the western desert. The western desert has one feature that makes it habitable: oases. An **oasis** is a low-lying area where underground lakes, or aquifers, are close to the surface, thus making the digging of wells and reservoirs easier. The western desert has six oases, the largest of which is known as the Fayum. The deserts also provide important raw materials that have shaped Egypt's economy. In antiquity, precious materials such as gold, copper, turquoise, agate, and tin were extracted from mines in the eastern deserts, while the western deserts provided limestone, ochre, diorite, amethyst, and natron, a key ingredient in the mummification process. These abundant natural resources were important factors in Egypt's trade relations with foreign kingdoms. Merchants shipped goods down the Nile for transportation throughout the Mediterranean, or transported them across the eastern desert to ports on the the Arabian Sea along dry riverbeds called **wadis**, which acted as natural pathways.

**In the Classroom:** Write the following questions on the board. These should remain up throughout the lesson to help students begin thinking like archaeologists.

- How did the geography of ancient Egypt ...
- ... influence trade?
- ... affect building construction?
- ... impact agriculture?
- ... connect with religion and spirituality?
- ... positively or negatively impact the residents?

**Worksheet:** Using the blank map of Egypt, have your students color the different geographic regions as you explain the characteristics of each: The Nile and surrounding valley, delta, oases, and deserts.

**Suggested Activity:** Create Your Own Nile Floodplain.



A modern roadway in Wadi Hammamat.

# THE HISTORY OF ANCIENT EGYPT



The Mortuary Temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahri. Dynasty 18.

The history of Egypt spans millennia. A systematic breakdown is helpful for understanding the ebb and flow through time of power and cultural traditions. Before our modern calendar was established, periods of time were often measured and named after a reigning king. Following this convention, modern scholars have divided different eras of Egyptian history into **kingdoms** and **intermediate periods**. The three kingdoms of ancient Egypt (the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms) were times of stability, unity, and a centralized government for Upper and Lower Egypt. The three intermediate periods of ancient Egypt (the First, Second, and Third Intermediate Periods) were times of fragmentation between Upper and Lower Egypt, instability, and decentralized government. The kingdoms and intermediate periods are further broken down into **dynasties**, which are numbered according to the groups of rulers who held power in Egypt during that time. In most of world history, dynasties usually follow family lines, but this is not the case in Egypt. Egypt's history is made up of 30 dynasties. This "dynastic" period was preceded by "Dynasty 0," when Egypt was on the brink of unification, and was followed by the Hellenistic Ptolemaic dynasty and Roman rule.



## IMPORTANT TERMS

- Kingdom
- Intermediate Period
- Dynasty
- Faience
- Narmer Palette
- King Djoser
- Hyksos
- Hatshepsut
- Akhenaten
- Tutankhamun
- Rameses II
- Kush
- Ptolemy

However, Egypt's history did not begin with Dynasty 0 and the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt. The region of Egypt was inhabited long before the establishment of the dynasties. This early period is important in our understanding of how the later Egyptian culture developed and spread throughout the region.

### **Predynastic Period: 4800–3100 BCE**

By around 6000 BCE, Egypt's climate became dry enough to support the domestication of plants and animals. This led to an important shift from a nomadic lifestyle to a settled, agrarian lifestyle. With the development of agriculture came the establishment of sedentary villages, social hierarchy, food surplus, job specialization, and the division of land.



#### **Think Like an Archaeologist**

How do we know what life in Predynastic Egypt was like? Writing had not yet been developed, so we have no texts to help us. It's time to Think Like an Archaeologist! Let's look at the evidence.

Excavated tombs dating to this time period display an increasing range in the quantity and quality of grave goods. That some members of society could afford lavish funerary provisions while others could not indicates the emergence of social classes. In addition, many grave goods were made from non-local materials, which must have been obtained through trade. This implies that Egyptian society had developed craft production in high-quality goods since participating in the trade of foreign luxury items requires the exchange of goods of equal value.

The production of high-quality goods demands time and specialized skills. A craftsman who invested their time in making goods instead of farming would need to buy food to eat. This indicates that some people in Egyptian society were producing a surplus of food, enough for others to purchase.

Archaeological evidence shows that urban centers developed in places where specialty goods and imports were traded. Excavations have revealed that these centers had large city walls, or fortifications, indicating that the people who lived in these cities had valuables they wanted to protect. Temples also appeared in urban centers during this period, which tells us that religion was becoming more centralized and that the specialized role of priest was also being fulfilled.

That is how we think like an archaeologist. We look at the artifacts left behind and think about what they can tell us about the people who used them and the wider world in which they lived. In this case, our evidence was an increase in the quantity and quality of grave goods beginning around 4800 BCE and the appearance of urban centers with fortifications and temples.

## Suggested Classroom Activity:

Let's take a closer look at some artifacts from Predynastic Egypt.

In Predynastic times, Upper and Lower Egypt were separate entities with distinct material cultures. Both developed unique practices for making tools and pottery. What do you think the artifacts pictured below can tell us about the people who used them? Look at the designs. What do you see? What about the shapes? What can the shapes of pots tell us about the people who made them? What about the decorations? Remember to think like an archaeologist. Look closely at each object, giving time for silent observation. Ask your students the following questions: What do you notice about this object? What do you wonder about it? What does it remind you of? There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. This is an opportunity for students to practice thinking like an archaeologist.



Pottery from Predynastic Upper Egypt.

Painted bowl. Naqada I Period.

Painted jar and pot. Naqada II Period.

For larger images, see page 76.



Watch an Artifact Exploration video about early Egyptian pottery.

[youtu.be/We9irQDsPKg](https://youtu.be/We9irQDsPKg)

## FAIENCE

**Faience** is a type of ceramic, but it is not made with clay. It is made with crushed quartz or sand mixed with a small amount of lime and a mixture of salts. When dampened, this mixture can be molded or formed into shapes like beads or figurines. As it dries, the salts are drawn to the surface; when fired in an oven, the lime and salts react with the silica from the quartz to form a surface glaze. Although faience has a range of colors, the most common are green and blue, which come from trace amounts of copper and cobalt in the raw materials.

The green and blue hues so common to faience were culturally important throughout Egyptian history because they represented the regeneration and rebirth brought by the Nile. This explains why so many faience objects, like these from the Kelsey, are found in tombs. It is also thought that faience was meant to mimic natural turquoise and lapis lazuli. Turquoise comes from the Sinai and lapis lazuli from Afghanistan—both were rare and expensive materials in ancient Egypt.



Examples of faience objects including an ushabti, Eye of Horus (wedjat) amulet, and a broad collar necklace (all from Late Period or Ptolemaic Period).

## Dynasty 0: 3100–3000 BCE

Dynasty 0 marked an important landmark in the recording of Egyptian history. During this period, we see the first appearance of hieroglyphs and the earliest references to “kings,” in tombs at Abydos. We know of several different kings ruling different parts of Egypt who were in conflict with one another. Eventually, a king named Narmer, sometimes referred to as Menes, triumphed over the others to unify Upper and Lower Egypt. At this time, there were many connections between Upper and Lower Egypt, specifically with regard to trade. While Upper Egypt had access to important mineral wealth, such as gold and precious stones, it lacked the agricultural richness and access to the Mediterranean enjoyed by Lower Egypt. This reciprocal relationship eased the way toward unification.

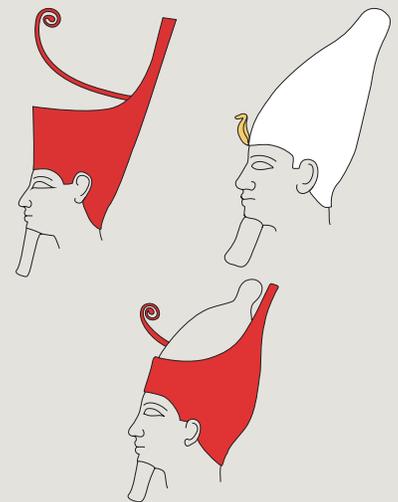


The Narmer Palette. Dynasty 0.

## THE UNIFICATION OF UPPER AND LOWER EGYPT

In truth, we do not know who unified Upper and Lower Egypt since there is no written history from this time. Archaeologists look for clues in the material record to help determine what happened. The primary piece of evidence for Egypt’s unification is an artifact known as the **Narmer Palette**. Ancient Egyptians typically used stone palettes for grinding cosmetics. However, the Narmer Palette is much too large to be of practical use. Moreover, its symbolic imagery and its findspot beneath the floor of a temple at Hierakonpolis suggest a ritual purpose.

On one side, we see King Narmer striking down his enemy with a mace while an attendant stands behind him. In front of Narmer, the god Horus in the form of a falcon holds another captive, possibly representing Lower Egypt. In this scene, Narmer wears the White Crown of Upper Egypt, which looks a bit like a bowling pin. The palette’s other side shows Narmer wearing the Red Crown of Lower Egypt as he inspects a battlefield of decapitated foes. The fact that Narmer is shown wearing both crowns indicates that he ruled both Upper and Lower Egypt. Later in Egyptian history, the two crowns were combined to form a double crown, symbolizing a unified Egypt.



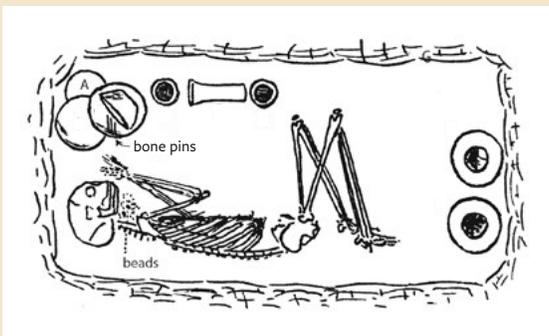
## Early Dynastic Period, Dynasties 1 and 2: 3000–2750 BCE

During the Early Dynastic Period, the capital of Egypt was located at Memphis, at the head of the Nile Delta. However, kings and important officials were buried at Abydos and Saqqara, in Upper Egypt. It is during this Early Dynastic Period that the ideology and theology surrounding kings developed. The king was not only the head of the state, he was also the high priest and head of religious activities in the country. Kings were considered gods on earth and it was their job to act as mediators between common people and the gods. The purpose of the daily religious activities, including rituals and sacrifices, was to maintain *maat*—the balance, harmony, and order of the world. Kings were responsible for maintaining *maat* even after death. How do we know? Monumental tombs and funerary temples at Abydos were constructed during this period. These were places where the king could continue to perform the daily rituals of maintaining *maat*, even in death.



### Think Like an Archaeologist

Only very high-ranking people were buried in ornate tomb complexes. Let's look at a more ordinary Early Dynastic tomb. What conclusions can we make about this person from their burial and grave goods? Can you identify the gender of this person by the objects in the tomb? What about their profession? Can you identify their social class? What other things might these objects tell us? This tomb belonged to a woman who we think was middle class. She had some wealth, as displayed by her bead necklace, bone hairpins, makeup, and beautifully made vessels.



Calcite bowl and galena fragments used for eye paint, faience bead necklace, bone hairpin. Early Dynastic Period.

Plan of grave with findspots of hairpins and beads indicated. "A" indicates the calcite bowl containing the galena fragments.

### **Old Kingdom, Dynasties 3–6: 2750–2260 BCE**

The Old Kingdom was marked by economic and political stability and massive state-organized building projects. **King Djoser**, the first king of the Old Kingdom, commissioned a massive temple and the very first pyramid, known today as the Step Pyramid, at the necropolis of Memphis at Saqqara. Kings of the following dynasties continued the tradition of building monumental pyramids and funerary complexes at Giza, including the Great Pyramid and the Sphinx.

These building projects would not have been possible without the stable central power of the Egyptian state. The materials and labor needed to build them were paid for in tax revenues, which the state collected through a central tax collecting entity. A central power was also necessary to mobilize the massive workforce and transport vast amounts of materials across the country.

The stability and centralized power of the period also allowed for outward economic expansion. During this time, kings sent expeditions into Nubia, the Levant, Sinai, and Libya to establish trade relations outside of Egypt. The Old Kingdom also saw hieroglyphic writing come to its full development with the use of over 800 characters. This would remain standard practice until the Hellenistic Ptolemaic dynasty, when over 5,000 characters were used.

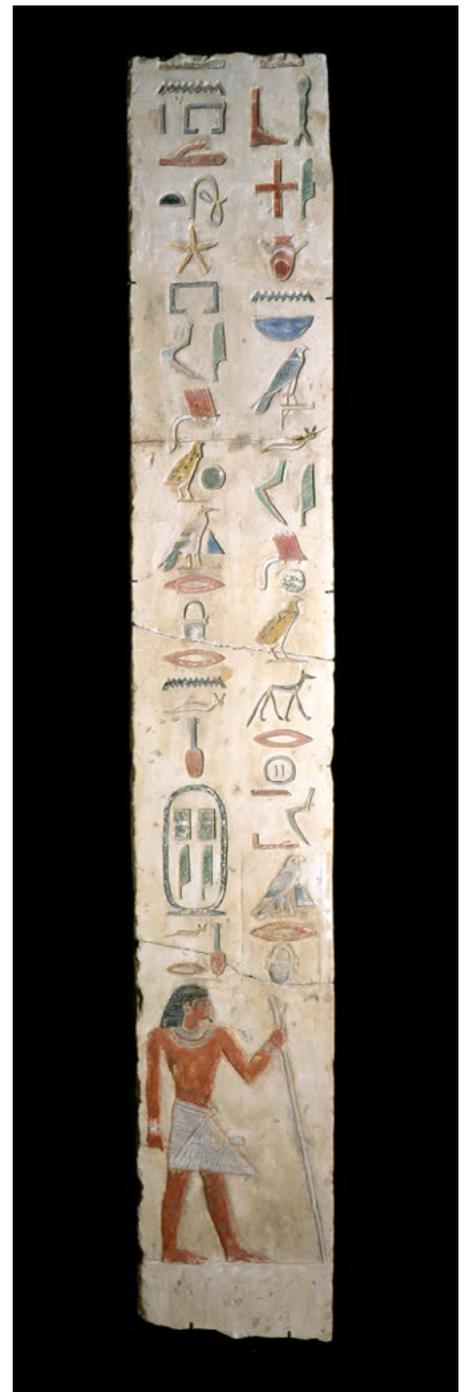
### **First Intermediate Period, Dynasties 7–11: 2260–2040 BCE**

The First Intermediate Period was a time of instability. Different sources give different evidence about who might have been king during this time. Can you think like an archaeologist and come up with some ideas about what this might indicate about this period of Egyptian history? We also have textual sources that talk about famine and invasions from Asia and Libya. Could this have contributed to the instability?

There are no monumental building projects or ornate royal tombs that date to the First Intermediate Period. Without strong central power, there was no way to harness a large workforce or transport goods. Local kings or ruling governors had less power than a single king. However, since less power and wealth was concentrated at the top of the social pyramid (with a central king), there was greater wealth, social mobility, and access to resources among members of the middle class. Archaeologists see increasing wealth and social status among commoners during this period reflected in tombs, which include texts and objects previously reserved for the highest elite and royalty.

### **Middle Kingdom, Dynasties 11–13: 2040–1650 BCE:**

The Middle Kingdom was a time of change in Egypt. After the instability and decentralized power of the First Intermediate Period, it was clear that the king's position was no longer secure. King Mentuhotep II reunified Upper and Lower Egypt and secured Egypt's borders by establishing border guards. He reorganized bureaucratic structures by installing regional governors who were loyal to him.



Painted limestone false door panel of Qar, also known as Pepy-Nefer. Dynasty 6.

With the return of centralized power came an increase in new building programs, such as those at Karnak. Unlike previous kingdoms and periods, there is a lot of textual evidence from the Middle Kingdom: letters, biographical texts, works of philosophy, religious texts, accounting inventories from temples, and so on. These texts give us insight into the daily life and politics of those living during the Middle Kingdom.

In the realm of religion, the cult of Re, which rose to prominence during the Old Kingdom, continued to be of central importance, but the god Amun also became increasingly significant. These two major deities were syncretized to create Amun-Re, a new state deity. In addition, the expansion of the cult of Osiris, which focused on the afterlife, meant that it was no longer just the king who could achieve life after death, but any individual in Egyptian society. This change is visible in the increased number of wealthy non-elite burials from this period, evidence that shows that not only were non-elites preparing for the afterlife just as the king would, but also that Egyptian society was experiencing increased social stratification.

### Second Intermediate Period, Dynasties 14–17: 1650–1570 BCE

Toward the end of the Middle Kingdom, there was a succession of multiple families ruling for only a generation or two. This constant change of leadership led to a period of decentralization we call the Second Intermediate Period. At the beginning of the Second Intermediate Period, Egyptian rule was overthrown by a group of people known as the **Hyksos**. The Hyksos took control of Lower Egypt and established their own government and capital in the city of Avaris in the Nile Delta.

The term Hyksos originates from an Egyptian term meaning “rulers of foreign lands.” However, this was not an invasion by a foreign people as later Egyptian propaganda would have us believe. In fact, people from the Levant (modern-day Israel, Syria, and Jordan, among other places) had been settling in the fertile lands of the delta for years. Eventually, they became numerous enough to overthrow Egyptian rule, which had been weakened by the decentralization of power. The Hyksos ruled only in Lower Egypt, while the native Egyptian dynasties continued to rule Upper Egypt from Thebes and Abydos.

The Hyksos kings adopted Egyptian names and customs and seem to have been on relatively peaceful terms with the Egyptian rulers at Thebes. They allowed Egyptians to graze their animals in the delta region and did not destroy or deface Egyptian monuments. However, they did levy large taxes on all traffic along the Nile, which caused resentment among those living in Upper Egypt. After 108 years of Hyksos rule, Upper Egyptians rebelled, overthrowing foreign rule and once again reuniting Egypt. This political change marks the beginning of the New Kingdom.



#### DID YOU KNOW?

We know a lot about life in the Middle Kingdom. How? Because in addition to archaeological evidence, we also have an abundance of textual evidence from this period. Documents of all kinds tell us about what people ate, the types of houses they lived in, their professions, and more.



#### THINK LIKE AN ARCHAEOLOGIST

The ancient Egyptians depicted the Hyksos in art and writing as violent barbarians who invaded Egypt and spoke a coarse language. If these were the only sources we had, that’s how we would see the Hyksos, too. However, as archaeologists, we look at the physical evidence, the artifacts left behind, and these tell a different story. The pottery, homes, and other material culture that have been excavated from Hyksos sites tell us that they had been living peacefully in the delta for generations. This is why it is important for archaeologists and historians to rely on more than just textual documents to rebuild our understanding of the past.



#### DID YOU KNOW?

The Hyksos introduced the horse-drawn chariot and the compound bow to Egypt, both of which added to Egypt’s military power during the New Kingdom.

## New Kingdom, Dynasties 18–20: 1570–1070 BCE

The New Kingdom is by far the best-documented period of ancient Egyptian history, with ample textual sources, art and architectural remains, and abundant archaeological research. In some ways, the New Kingdom is also Egypt's most iconic period. Some of Egypt's most famous kings ruled during this time of relative stability, including King Tut and Rameses II. The New Kingdom is sometimes known as the “Golden Age” of ancient Egypt. This is in part because during this period Egypt controlled many gold resources in northeast Africa, but mostly because Egypt was prosperous and flourished on the international stage. The New Kingdom was a time of territorial expansion and economic prosperity. Egypt sent expeditions south to conquer areas of Nubia (ancient Kush, in modern-day Sudan), west into Libya, and north into the Levant. Egypt also formed diplomatic and economic ties with the island of Crete and other kingdoms in the Middle East.

Foreign policy during the New Kingdom was aggressive and imperialistic. Kings no longer sought to maintain Egypt's borders, but created a buffer zone of vassal states between Egypt and the powerful kingdoms of the Middle East. These vassal states were formed through a combination of invasions and political marriages. No Egyptian princess ever left Egypt to marry into a foreign court, but many foreign princesses became part of the Egyptian court.

While religion was always an integral part of ancient Egyptian culture, worship of the gods became even more prominent in the New Kingdom. Temples to all the gods, but especially Amun, flourished throughout Egypt during this period. Amun's main temple was at Karnak and every New Kingdom king added to it. Temples were supported by land deeded to the god by the king and by private individuals. The hierarchy of temples was similar to the hierarchy of the state institutions. Priests were at the top of the hierarchy and temple workers and farmers of the deeded land were at the bottom. (See the pyramid of social hierarchy in the Government and Social Structures lesson.) During a brief period under the king Akhenaten, worship of all other gods aside from Aten was outlawed. Akhenaten closed all other temples and moved his capital to Amarna in order to weaken the power of the priests of Amun.

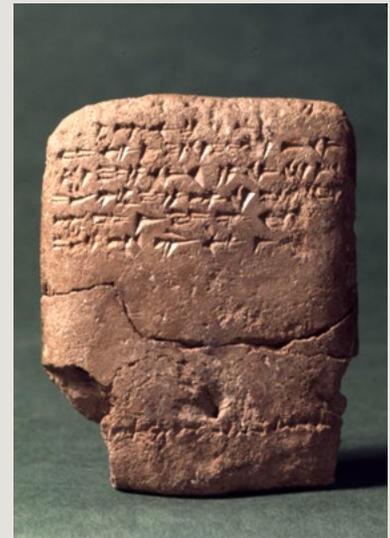


Temple of Amun at Karnak, 1920.

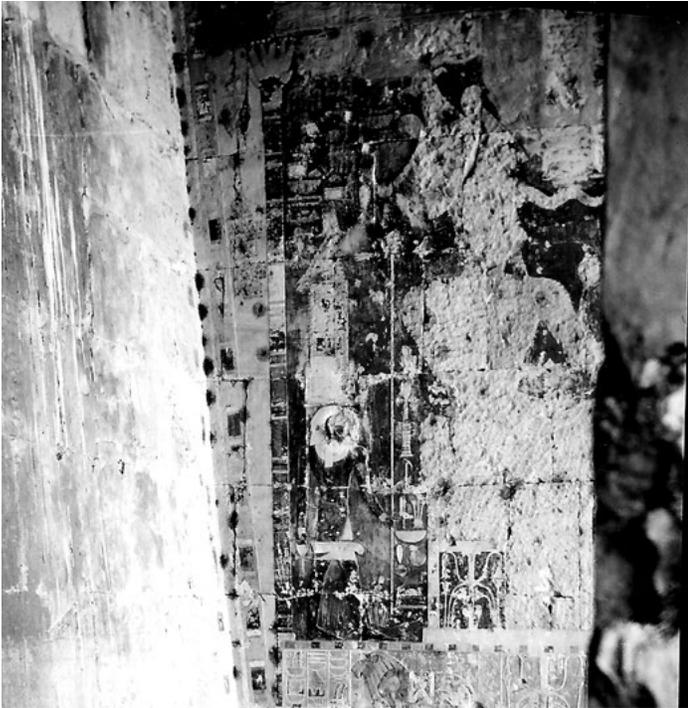
## AMARNA

We know much about 18th Dynasty foreign policy from the Amarna letters.

- The Amarna letters are 382 clay tablets found at the city of Amarna, a short-lived capital in Upper Egypt during the rule of Akhenaten.
- They are mostly correspondence with the Levant and Syria/Lebanon, but there are some letters to Assyria (2), Babylonia (14), Cyprus (8), and other states in the Middle East.
- They were all written in Akkadian cuneiform, not Egyptian hieroglyphs or hieratic.
- They deal with about 30 years of diplomatic relations. Most of the letters discuss mutual defense pacts, economic issues, and gift exchange.



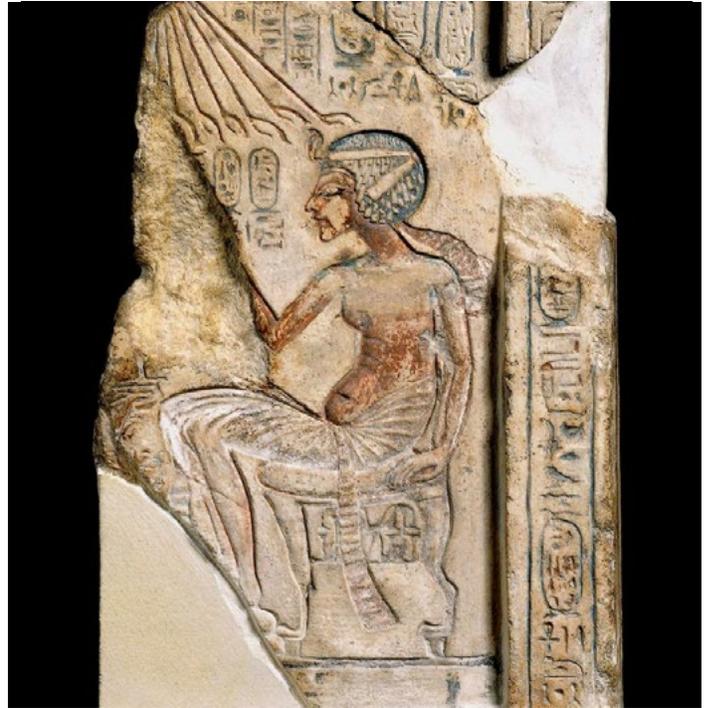
Clay tablet from the Amarna archive: Letter from Yapahu of Gazru to the king of Egypt.



Defaced image of Hatshepsut.  
Mortuary Temple of Hatshepsut, Deir el-Bahari.

Royal women became more prominent in the New Kingdom; the most famous of all was **Hatshepsut**. When her brother-husband died after only three years on the throne, his son, Thutmose III, was named king, despite the fact that he was still a child. Hatshepsut, the young ruler's aunt-stepmother, was installed as regent (temporary ruler), presumably with the intention of stepping down when Thutmose III was old enough to fulfill his duties as king. But before long there appeared public depictions of Hatshepsut as a king and she claimed the throne as the daughter of Thutmose I (the king before her husband) and the sun god Re.

During her long rule, Hatshepsut sponsored an extensive building program throughout Egypt, the economy and trade prospered, and she led a successful military campaign to Nubia. Hatshepsut seems to have ruled for 20–21 years. She disappears from the sources quite suddenly, at which point we see evidence that Thutmose III took sole control of Egypt. His successor, Amenhotep II, later tried to erase Hatshepsut's memory by obscuring or defacing monuments that showed her as king; the monuments depicting her as queen to Thutmose II were left intact.



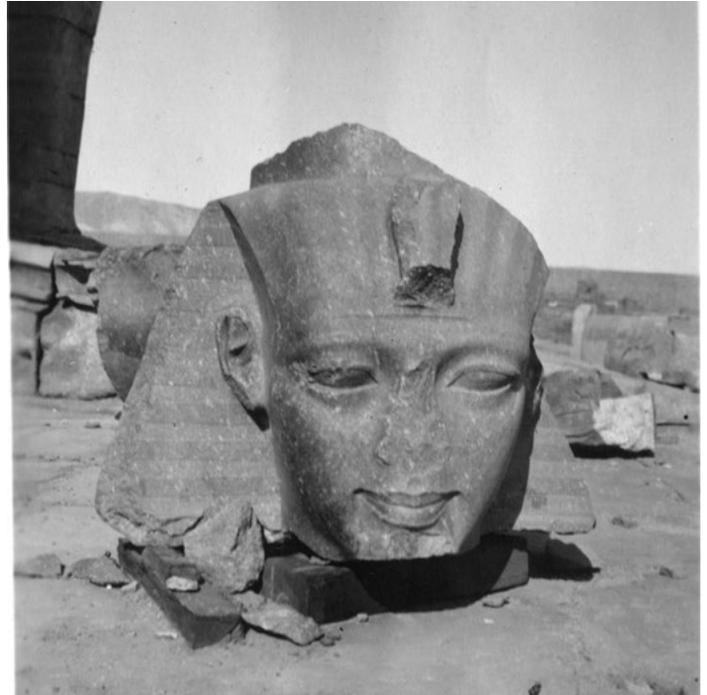
Fragmentary limestone stela showing Akhenaten.

**Akhenaten** was one of the last and most controversial kings of the 18th Dynasty. He was responsible for abandoning the temples of the traditional Egyptian gods and focusing worship on the sun god, Aten. This may have been a political and economic strategy for limiting the power and wealth of the priests of Amun-Re, or it may have been an action of serious religious conviction. This shift changed Egyptian art as well. Under Atenism, only the royal family could communicate with Aten, and so only the king and his family were depicted with the deity. The style of depicting the human form also changed. Heads and fingers became elongated and bodies appeared full and androgynous. Akhenaten himself was depicted with a long drooping chin, narrow oval eyes, a heavy belly, and hips, perhaps signifying that he was the mother and father of mankind. He moved the Egyptian capital to the city of Amarna, which he built from scratch and dedicated only to Aten. Akhenaten's rule was still a time of peace and good foreign relations, although it does seem the king had a habit of ignoring letters from other kings.



Replica of the funerary mask of Tutankhamun.

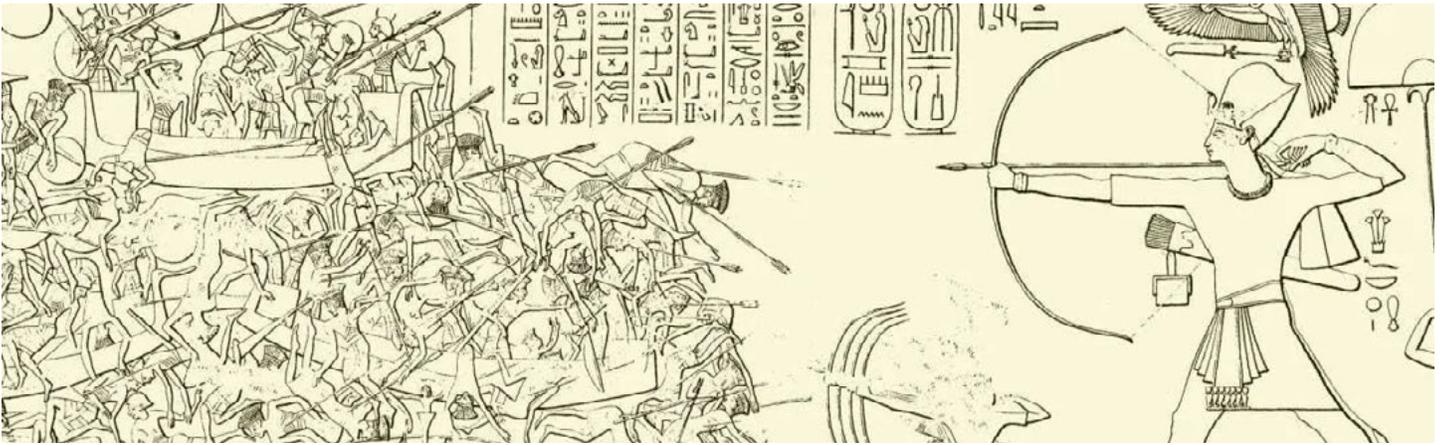
Akhenaten's heir was Tutankhaten, who changed his name to **Tutankhamun** when he restored the traditional temples and worship of the Egyptian gods. He took the throne at the age of 9 or 10 and ruled until his death at age 18. He moved the capital back to Memphis, after which Amarna was slowly abandoned. Tutankhamun is known primarily because of Howard Carter's 1922 discovery of his nearly intact tomb in the Valley of the Kings on the west bank of the Nile at Thebes.



Head of Rameses II from a colossal statue. Ramesseum at Thebes.

**Rameses II** (or Rameses the Great) was the third king of the 19th Dynasty and was an expert at propaganda. Even today we regard him as one of ancient Egypt's greatest rulers. As prince, he launched several campaigns in the Levant, including the Battle of Qadesh against the Hittites in the spring of 1274 BCE. During this battle, he forced the Hittites to retreat to Qadesh, but was ultimately unable to capture the city. Nevertheless, in Egypt, he advertised the battle as a "great military victory." It is depicted in relief on all the major temples and long narratives were written describing the event—it was one of the greatest PR campaigns of all time.

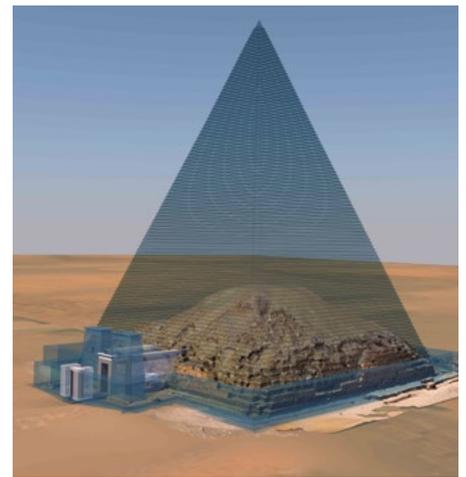
Rameses II was also an international diplomat and an avid builder. One of his most famous building projects was two rock-cut temples at Abu Simbel in Nubia, dedicated to himself and one of his queens. (These temples were moved to higher ground before the construction of the Aswan High Dam in 1968.) Rameses II brought great wealth to Egypt through numerous military campaigns. He is also the Rameses mentioned in the biblical Exodus. Rameses II reigned for 67 years. He died at the age of 90, outliving many of his wives, children, and even grandchildren.



Ramesses III and his fleet in battle with the Sea Peoples.

### Third Intermediate Period, Dynasties 21–25: 1070–664 BCE

During the 20th Dynasty (New Kingdom), a group of people the Egyptians referred to as the “Sea Peoples” suddenly appeared in the eastern Mediterranean. We don’t know much about the Sea Peoples. It is possible they came from Sardinia, western Turkey, Greece, or Crete; that they were Mycenaeans, Cretans, Philistines, Trojans—or maybe all of the above. One of the more plausible theories is that extreme crop failure led many different groups to leave their homelands in Anatolia, the Levant, Greece, and Italy to seek food elsewhere. During this time, the Hittite Empire collapsed, Mycenaean cities destroyed one another, and there was general upheaval in the Mediterranean. This was the time of the legendary destruction of Troy. During the 19th and 20th Dynasties, people on ships attacked the Mediterranean coastline from Egypt to Turkey, trying to colonize the mainland. The Egyptians stopped them from gaining ground in Egypt. We know from Egyptian descriptions that not only were there soldiers on these ships but also families and livestock—like refugees.



Rendering of a Nubian pyramid with its original form shown in blue. Note the steep sides. Dynasty 25.

It was during the 20th Dynasty that these struggles, along with economic inflation, royal family squabbling, and priests gaining power over the king, lead to a total decentralization of the Egyptian state, which we call the Third Intermediate Period.

The Third Intermediate Period covers the 21st through 25th Dynasties. These dynasties overlapped in time and ruled from different cities. Egypt was very much divided. Some areas were ruled by so-called kings, some by priests, some by foreign invaders (from Libya, Assyria, and Nubia).

### The 25th Dynasty: The Time of the Black Pharaohs

The 25th Dynasty was a line of kings that originated in the kingdom of **Kush**, south of Egypt in modern-day Sudan. These kings were able to unify Upper and Lower Egypt for a short period, creating the largest empire since the end of the New Kingdom. While the Kushites adopted many aspects of Egyptian culture, such as the building of pyramid funerary monuments, they also had many distinct traditions. Their pyramids had steeper sides than Egyptian ones, while their gods became syncretized with some of the popular Egyptian gods such as Amun.

### Late and Ptolemaic Periods, Dynasty 26–Roman Annexation: 664–30 BCE

After a brief reunification under the 25th Dynasty centered at Napata in Kush, and the 26th Dynasty centered at Sais in the delta, Egypt was conquered by the Persians under Darius I in 525 BCE. This marked the end of native Egyptian rule over their own land. The Persians largely left Egyptian culture alone, installing a local governor loyal to Persia to rule Egypt. However, by 332 BCE, Persia was defeated by the armies of Alexander of Macedon, known as Alexander the Great.

Alexander established the city of Alexandria and was declared the son of the syncretic god Zeus-Amun, which gave him the right to rule as king. When Alexander died in 323 BCE, his expansive kingdom was divided among his four top generals. **Ptolemy** was given charge of the land of Egypt. Ptolemy and his successors maintained the hierarchical structure that existed in previous dynasties, installing themselves as kings and queens. Under the Ptolemies, Egypt became an even more important player on the international stage, providing essential grain to the entire Mediterranean basin. During this time, Hellenistic culture blended with native Egyptian culture in unique ways that would continue through the Roman conquest. Alexandria became a cosmopolitan center of Hellenistic culture and art and home to the famed Library of Alexandria.

Egypt's role as the breadbasket of the ancient world is one of the reasons that it was so alluring to the Romans. During the second and first centuries BCE, the Roman state was outgrowing its ability to feed its citizens due to an exploding population and the employment of thousands of soldiers stationed across the empire. In 30 BCE, after a civil war between Octavian (soon to be called Augustus, first emperor of Rome) and Marcus Antonius (Marc Antony) with the help of Cleopatra VII, Egypt was officially made part of the Roman Empire, ending thousands of years of rule by kings.

**Suggested activity:** Timeline “Puzzle”

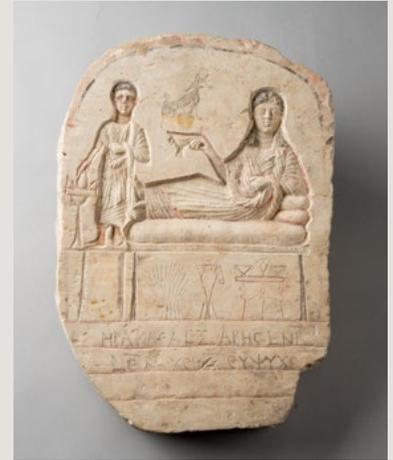


Marble bust of Augustus, first emperor of Rome. Early Roman Period.



Silver coin of Ptolemy I. Ptolemaic Period.

### EGYPT UNDER ROMAN RULE



Egyptian funerary stela with Greek inscription. Roman Period.

Egyptian culture did not disappear with the conquest of Rome. The people living in Egypt were now a mixture of native Egyptians, Hellenistic Greeks, and Romans. These communities mixed together to create new cultural practices, gods, and complex identities. We can see these blended identities in the syncretic gods like Isis-Aphrodite, Serapis (a combination of the Greek gods Dionysus, Hades, and Demeter, and the Egyptian gods Apis and Osiris). We also see it in funerary markers like this one. This stela was found in the Graeco-Roman Egyptian town of Terenouthis. On it, we can see markers of different cultures. Greek text reads “Heralela, Aged 60, Ares, aged 53. Year 5, Mechir 1. Be of good cheer.” The people depicted on the stela are wearing Roman-style dress and reclining on a divan. The image also shows grave offerings, the type which would have been present in Egyptian tombs, as well as a small figure of Anubis, the Egyptian guide on the journey through the underworld. What do you think this tells us about the identity of the person who was entombed at this grave? What are they trying to tell us about themselves?

## GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL STRUCTURES



Depiction of a trading expedition on the walls of the Mortuary Temple of Hatshepsut. Dynasty 18.

### Origins of Complex Social Systems

As discussed in the History section of this resource guide, by around 6000 BCE, the climate in Egypt had become more arid. With this environmental shift, the semi-nomadic groups that had populated the land of Egypt began settling in permanent villages and domesticating plants and animals to ensure more reliable food sources. Egypt's natural geography and the development of **irrigation** technology played a central role in the success of these new agricultural settlements. By constructing canals, dikes, and reservoirs to harness water generated by the annual Nile inundation, the newly settled Egyptians were able to transform large swaths of desert into fertile farmland.

As Egyptians settled into a more sedentary lifestyle, the economic and social needs of individuals and groups changed. No longer did households grow all their own food. Instead, they might grow one or two crops, while their neighbors grew one or two different crops. For example, one household might grow wheat and onions, while its neighbor grew beans and dates, and yet another neighbor grew lettuce and melons. This agricultural specialization led to



### IMPORTANT TERMS

Irrigation  
Market Economy  
Surplus  
King/Pharaoh  
Vizier  
Scribe

changes in how people related to one another and resulted in changes in Egypt's economy. Previously, the Egyptian economy was what is known as a gift economy. In a gift economy, goods are not sold for a fixed price in a market. Instead, goods are exchanged with an implicit understanding that their value will be returned to the seller either in the form of other goods of similar value or in the form of intangible political or social rewards, such as honor or status. With the agricultural revolution, Egypt saw a shift to a **market economy**, where goods have a fixed value, often loosely determined by the pressures of supply and demand. Going back to the previous example, in a market economy, one household might trade a set measure of its wheat in exchange for a set measure of its neighbors dates. If, however, several of their neighbors have dates, they can shop around for the best market value. Supply, demand, and competition set the market value of commodities.



Since ancient times, Egyptians have dug canals, like this one near Karanis, to bring water to the desert to create farmland. Many are still in use today.



Remains of a granary at Karanis, Egypt. The small storerooms, at right, were attached to a larger storage and food administration building, at left. Roman Period.

A household that produces more of something than it needs has a **surplus**. In Egypt, as more people specialized in the cultivation of particular crops, they generated surpluses that they could trade with neighbors. But what happens to the product that's left over after you've traded with your neighbors? Administrative structures were created in Egypt to manage food storage and distribution, as well as the distribution of land and labor. New social and economic roles such as scribes and administrators were created to maintain these distribution centers. This led to inequalities in land ownership; some individuals owned a lot of land, while some laborers and administrators owned no land at all. This uneven distribution of wealth led to the emergence of social classes and hierarchies. Administrators, governors, and ultimately local governments were now necessary to organize the complex functions of a society with laws, markets, and different social classes. Some small villages grew into towns, and eventually cities. Regional and national governments emerged to govern Egypt's increasingly large and complex political, economic, and social institutions.



### Think Like an Archaeologist

How can physical evidence inform us about social changes? Remember, this is a time before writing.

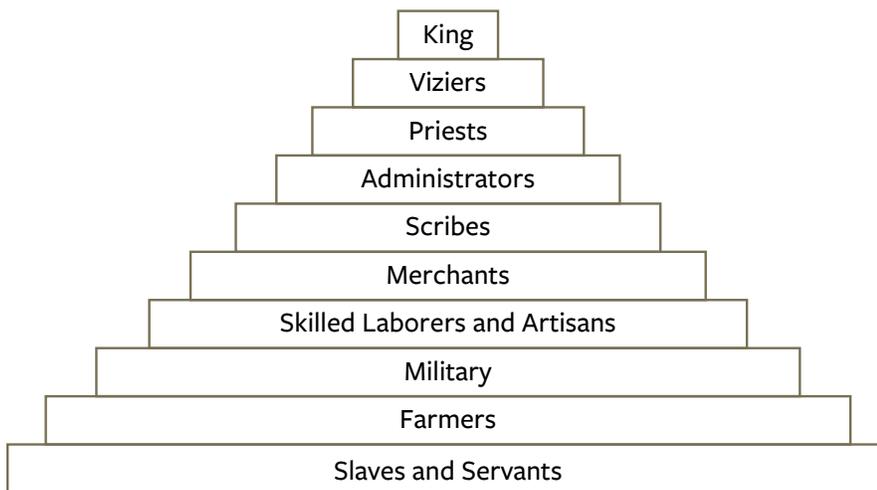
- Archaeologists uncover evidence of irrigation canals and dikes dating to approximately 6000 BCE.
- Around 5000 BCE, archaeologists find evidence of mudbrick homes clustered together in small settlements.
- Buildings such as granaries (public storerooms for grain) are found, along with buildings that are too large to be private homes. These are public administrative buildings.
- Large tombs with ornate grave goods appear by 4000 BCE, indicating the presence of a growing elite class.
- Grave goods are found that were produced with non-local materials (even coming from the Levant, Syria, and the Sudan). This indicates the existence of international trade relationships.
- Archaeologists find towns dating to approximately 3500 BCE that have many private homes, administrative buildings, and workshops for craftsmen. This indicates the existence of growing urban centers and increased complexity of social relationships.
- Thick fortification walls and temples to gods appeared in large cities by 3100 BCE. City walls are suggestive of wealth and the existence of an army or police force.



### VOCABULARY NOTE

When learning about ancient Egypt, we often see the term **pharaoh** used to describe the **king**. However, this term was not used by the Egyptians until the New Kingdom. Pharaoh literally means “great house,” and may not have been used to describe individual rulers, but rather their family line or physical location in the palace. We use the term king throughout this resource guide because, for the majority of history, this is the term used by Egyptians to describe their leaders.

## SOCIAL SYSTEMS



All societies have a complex social organization, or social system, that governs how people relate to each other. In Egypt, this social organization affected many of the aspects of Egyptian life discussed in this resource guide, including daily life, religious beliefs and traditions, and government. We can better understand these complex social relationships in ancient Egypt by organizing them in a pyramid structure. Let’s take a look at the social pyramid, starting at the top.

## King

At the top of the pyramid was the king of Upper and Lower Egypt. The king was considered the divine descendant of the god Horus, son of the first king, Osiris. He was the mortal representative of the gods and would return to the gods when he died. He was responsible for maintaining *maat*, the balance of the cosmic order. As a result, the king was responsible for the actions of all his subjects and took on the duties of judge, lawmaker, and chief priest, among many others. All social, political, religious, and cultural institutions in Egypt were led by him.

## Vizier

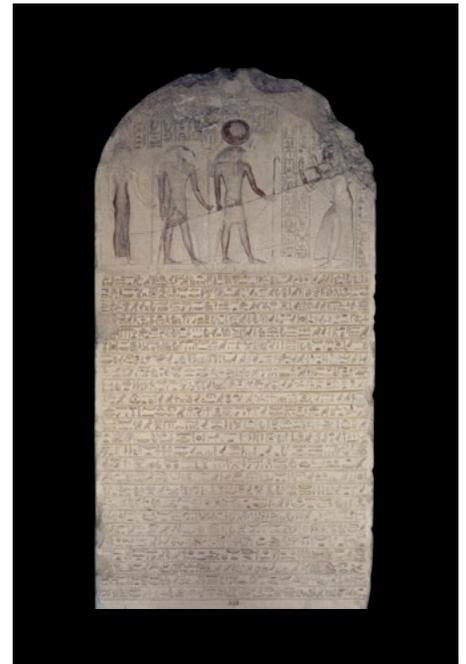
In order to fulfill his duties, the king relied on a system of administrators who were supervised by a chief administrator, the **vizier**. The vizier reported to the king and functioned as his chief advisor, treasurer, chief justice, high priest, and overseer. There could be multiple viziers at any given point, each responsible for overseeing a particular nome, district, or the entirety of Egypt.

## Priests

A priesthood could be a full-time position for one individual, or a rotating position for several people. Religion was not a separate institution from the government. Priests were also administrative officials, serving the king as well as the gods. Priests sometimes served more than one god, even at different temples. Most priests were men, but women could also be priests in some periods. Priests were allowed to marry and priesthoods were often passed from father to son. Very little is known about how priests were trained but, like the civic officials, they were organized in a hierarchy and could achieve promotions. A priest's rank within the hierarchy determined how he moved within the temple and which functions he performed. The different ranks were distinguished by specific clothing, headdresses, or hairstyles. Within Egyptian society, priests held high status, as is evident by the quality of Djehutymose's coffin. Djehutymose was a priest of the god Horus at Edfu.

## Administrators

Administrators were officers who ran the government on behalf of the king. They were supervised by the vizier and the king and performed a diverse set of duties. These included collecting taxes, administering provinces, and acting as overseers or scribes.



Stela showing a man, at right, making offerings to the gods Re-Horakhty, Thoth, and Maat. Dynasty 18.



Limestone stela showing a priest making offerings. Dynasties 27–30.

## Scribes

**Scribes** were integral to the proper functioning of the Egyptian bureaucracy. As part of the 1 percent of Egyptians who were literate, scribes were responsible for documenting and delivering orders, keeping records (including taxes and wages), checking balances, granting permissions, and drafting legal and personal documents. While the position of scribe was generally passed from father to son, in theory, any male could become a scribe if his family could afford to send him to school. Literacy was viewed as a means for social, economic, and bureaucratic advancement since scribes played such a crucial role in the functioning of government and society.

## Merchants

Egypt was a hub of regional trade, situated as it was between Nubia and sub-Saharan Africa to the south, North Africa to the west, the Mediterranean to the north, and the Middle East and India (via the Red Sea) to the east. Egypt produced many goods and resources—such as grain, gold, marble, and granite—that were desirable to its regional neighbors. Merchants could become quite prosperous exchanging Egyptian products for foreign luxury goods, like lapis lazuli, exotic foods and spices, and silk.

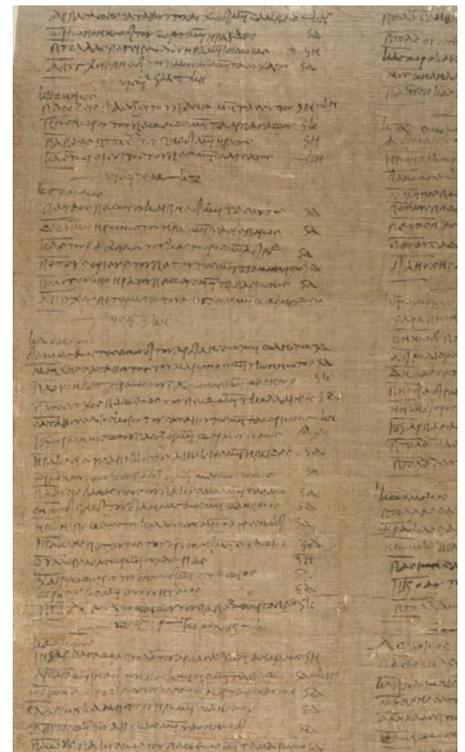
## Skilled Laborers and Artisans

Craftsmen in Egyptian society were well trained and highly valued. Like scribes, the children of craftsmen usually pursued their parents' professions and were trained through apprenticeships. Apprentices worked for either the temples or royal workshops, supporting these institutions with their crafts. Craftspeople were typically paid in grain, which they could exchange for other goods and services. It is possible that craftspeople sometimes took on private commissions outside their responsibilities to the temples and state. In workshops, production functioned like an assembly line, with each person in the workshop focusing on one particular element of production.

## Military

During the Old Kingdom, Egyptians were conscripted into the army in times of war. But by the Middle Kingdom, Egypt had a large standing army of professional soldiers. Soldiers were paid like other government workers and given opportunities for promotion. Promotion included increased compensation, sometimes through land grants that could lead to higher social status. Since any Egyptian male could enlist, the army became an avenue of upward social mobility.

In the Roman Period, professional soldiers from the Roman army were stationed throughout Egypt. Displayed in the Kelsey are papyri related to the Roman barracks at Karanis, as well as military discharge papers of soldiers stationed there. The soldiers at Karanis were not locals, but we do have evidence that individuals from Karanis joined the Roman army. Several papyrus letters in the Kelsey collections were written by soldiers at various posts around the empire to their parents in Karanis. The soldiers stationed in Karanis were probably from other provinces in the empire, like Greece.



A papyrus document recording the collection of taxes. Roman Period.

## Farmers

Agriculture was the foundation of the kingdom's economy and farmers made up the majority of the Egyptian population. Agricultural land was divided into plots along irrigation canals. Farmers typically did not own the land they worked, but leased it and thus gave much of what they produced to the landowners (often the temples and the state) as rent. Occasionally, some farmers did own land. The lease or ownership of land was usually passed down through family lines. Some farmers were able to hire contract labor to help them maintain their plots.

## Slaves

Slavery did exist in Egypt, though it was not common. It is challenging to understand slavery in ancient Egypt because the terms used to describe a slave owned as property and a paid servant are the same. Still, there are pieces of evidence that clearly attest to the sale and purchase of people. Slaves could be foreigners captured in war or debtors or criminals. The institution of slavery in Egypt seems to have been centered on the ownership of labor and produce, rather than people as individuals. Slaves could be freed at the will of their owners.

Understanding the balance of power within this social pyramid is essential to understanding the patterns of governance throughout Egyptian history. By about 3100 BCE, two distinct kingdoms developed in Egypt, Upper and Lower, each with its own king or kings. These kingdoms were isolated from each other by the desert and each possessed its own particular set of resources. Once joined, the kingdom collectively gained access to a wide range of natural resources, abundant agricultural lands, and trade routes throughout the Mediterranean basin and east toward central Asia. United, Upper and Lower Egypt were what we would now call a superpower.

The unification of Upper and Lower Egypt through conquest by King Narmer (alternatively known as Menes) initiated a period of strong central government. During the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms, when power was centralized at the top of the social pyramid, Egypt witnessed the construction of monumental buildings, the expansion of borders and trade, and widespread stability and prosperity. During the Intermediate periods, power shifted away from the king at the top of the pyramid and was distributed toward the middle of the pyramid to viziers, priests, and local governors. As a result, the central government was weak, there was greater power among the local priests and elite, and greater differences in status and wealth between the upper, middle, and lower classes.



Examples of ancient farm tools: drag hoe, shears, and miniature hammer. Roman Period.

## DAILY LIFE IN ANCIENT EGYPT



Wall-painting of a man plowing a field, from the burial chamber of Sennedjem at Deir el-Medina, New Kingdom.

### The Archaeology of Daily Life

In this section, we discuss the archaeology of daily life in ancient Egypt. Understanding daily life requires knowledge of Egypt's social pyramid, as discussed in the Government and Social Structures section of this resource guide. Members of different parts of the social pyramid led very different types of lives due to their varied occupations, incomes, and access to resources. In the pages that follow, we explore ancient Egyptian housing, diet, and the lives of children. Religion and customs surrounding death are addressed in later sections.

### Housing

#### *Dynastic Egypt*

There is little evidence for houses from Dynastic Egypt. This is because most ancient settlements are buried under modern towns. Over time, each successive generation has added to pre-existing homes or constructed new buildings on top of older homes, so that archaeologists cannot access them. Our knowledge of ancient houses relies largely on artifacts that date to these early periods in Egyptian history that have been found beneath modern homes.



### IMPORTANT TERMS

Mudbrick

There are, however, a few notable exceptions. Deir el-Medina and Amarna are well-preserved ancient towns that provide useful evidence for Egyptian houses. Both were desert settlements, constructed specifically to house the craftsmen who worked to construct the nearby royal tombs. It is therefore difficult to know whether these dwellings are typical of ancient Egypt as a whole, or if they represent a specific type of desert architecture.

Another source of evidence for Egyptian houses are the small house models that are sometimes found in tombs. These models may be accurate reproductions of houses, or they might be idealized versions. Most evidence suggests that typical Egyptian houses were constructed of **mudbrick**, were one or two stories tall, and had multiple rooms, including a reception space at the front of the house and a private space at the back. Most household activity would have taken place outside the house or in the courtyard in front of the home.

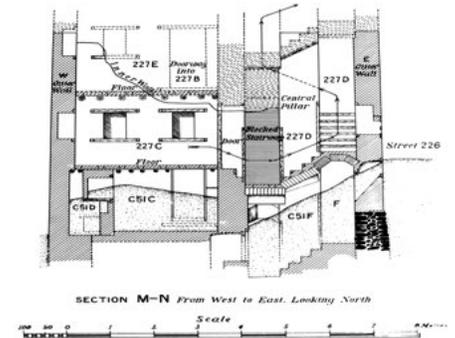
### *Graeco-Roman Egypt*

A third site with well-preserved houses is the city of Karanis. The mudbrick houses of Karanis were multistory structures built adjacent to one another in city blocks. These houses shared party walls and a courtyard space where many of the household activities took place. Interior flights of stairs connected the different floors of each house, including its underground storage rooms.

Karanis was an agricultural town founded during the Ptolemaic dynasty. The Ptolemies established many cities in Egypt as a way to settle Greek mercenaries among the native Egyptian population and increase agricultural production to support the kingdom. Karanis was located on the eastern edge of the Fayum, the largest oasis in Egypt, along the road to Memphis (now Cairo). Evidence from Karanis is invaluable for understanding the archaeology of Egyptian daily life for two reasons. First, it was a permanent town of regular people who, unlike the workmen of Deir el-Medina and Amarna, lived typical lives. Second, Karanis was particularly well preserved because the city was slowly abandoned as it was buried by frequent sandstorms. This gives us a uniquely accurate snapshot of Egyptian daily life over several generations. Imagine this: you are having dinner in your house when suddenly a sandstorm erupts, and you take cover outside town. When you return after the sandstorm, you find that the basement storeroom and first floor of your house are filled with sand! To make matters worse, the street outside your house is filled with sand and is now much higher. Do you dig out the street and your basement? The residents of Karanis did not. They just added another level to their home, cut a new front door at the higher street level, and began using their now half-buried first floor as a storage room. How do we know about this process? The houses that were excavated at Karanis were often two to three stories with subterranean storerooms. When archaeologists excavated the site, they found everyday objects like drinking glasses, doors, baskets, and cooking pots sitting just where they had been left, 2,000 years before. In the subterranean storerooms, perfectly preserved foodstuffs were uncovered, still in their storage amphorae.



Clay offering tray depicting a two-story house within an enclosure. Egypt, Dynasty 12.



Schematic of a multi-story house at Karanis. Note that the lower levels are filled with sand and a new door has been cut at a higher level.



Amphorae as found in the storeroom of a house at Karanis.

Much of what we know about daily life in ancient Egypt comes from sites like Karanis. We can use the evidence from these sites to identify the types of foods, tools, and other technologies that ancient Egyptians used on a daily basis. Let's take a look at some of the evidence of daily life from Karanis.

### Diet

In ancient Egypt, everyone, regardless of social status, had access to bread, beer, and some vegetables. Since wages were paid in grain, it was widely available and often used to make bread and beer. Locally grown produce included leeks, onions, garlic, legumes, and melons. Raw onion was a particular favorite pairing with bread. Lower-class Egyptians may have had occasional access to fish or poultry. Elite Egyptians certainly had access to fish and poultry as well as red meat, honey, and imported produce. They also drank wine made in Egypt.



Household objects and preserved food from Karanis. Roman Period. Clockwise from upper left: cooking pot, peach pits, dates, lupine seeds, murex shell, olive pressings (used as fuel or animal fodder), fish hook, nutshells, and wheat ears.

### HOW TO MAKE BREAD AND BEER



Painted wooden models of bakers and beer brewers, from the tomb of Meketre at Deir el-Bahri. Middle Kingdom.

Both bread and beer began with a dough made from grain. Dough intended for bread was fully baked; dough intended for beer was partly baked, then broken up into pieces and put into a large vat. Water and date juice were added and the mixture was left to ferment. It was then strained and transferred to smaller pots that were sealed with clay stoppers.



Stoppered glass decanter with two stemmed glasses. Roman Period.

## Tools and Technology

Many of the tools and technologies used by the residents of Karanis look similar to those we use today. Brooms, hooks and pulleys, even a reusable shopping bag, are instantly recognizable to the modern eye. Shoes from Karanis look just like modern flip-flops; look closely at ancient examples and you'll see that they even tended to break in the same places. In 2,000 years of use, humans have not perfected flip-flop technology.

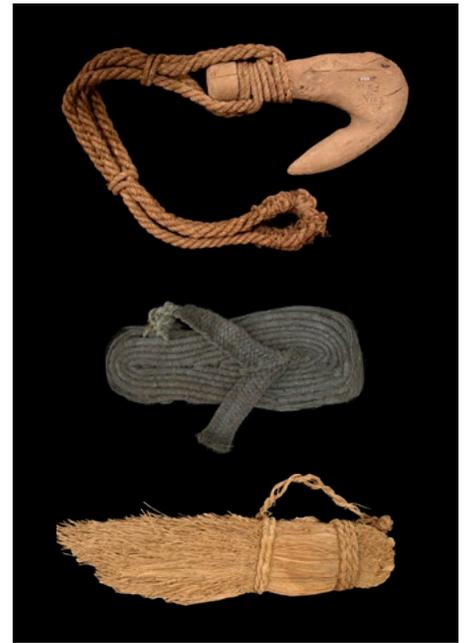


### Think Like an Archaeologist

Let's take a closer look at a door and a wooden storage box that were excavated at Karanis. What do you notice about them? They have locks! What does the fact that the ancient Karanians had locks on their doors tell us about how they were living? It tells us that they wanted to keep the people and things in their homes safe from intruders. The storage box tells us that people had valuables they wanted to safeguard. Archaeologists can deduce from this that the residents of Karanis had portable wealth that they stored in their homes.



Locking technology from Karanis. Wooden door with lock, wooden storage box with bronze lock plate; two lock cases, and wooden key with "key chain." Roman Period.



Objects of daily life. Wooden hook and palm fiber rope, palm fiber sandal, and palm fiber whisk broom. Roman Period.

## Entertainment

Ancient Egyptians enjoyed entertainment and leisure, when time allowed. This included banqueting, sports, gaming, dancing, and music.

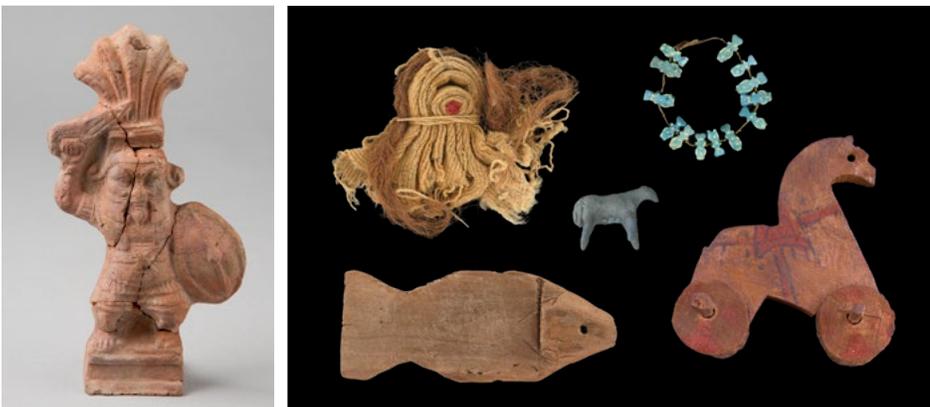


Objects of entertainment. On black field, from upper left: wooden clapper, clay figurine of a musician playing a hand-drum, wooden flute, and bronze bell. Lower left: conical glass dice cup with bone dice. Roman Period.

## Children

Being a child in ancient Egypt, as in much of the ancient world, was dangerous. Childhood mortality was very high due to unsanitary living conditions, disease, the trauma of childbirth, and lack of effective medical care. Egyptians turned to the god Bes for protection against these dangers. Images of Bes, a bearded dwarf god, were kept near the expectant mother during childbirth to scare away evil spirits. Amulets of Bes were worn by children to repel malicious demons that could cause disease or misfortune.

But childhood in Karanis wasn't all doom and gloom. Archaeologists have recovered many children's toys from the site, indicating that play was just as much a part of ancient Egyptian childhood as it is today. Examples include wheeled wooden horses, animal figurines, miniature tools and eating vessels, dolls or pacifiers, spinning tops, game pieces, dice, and noisemakers.



Objects of childhood. Left: clay statuette of Bes. Right, clockwise from upper left: woolen rag doll, clay animal figurine, string of faience Bes amulets, wooden wheeled horse, wooden toy fish. Roman Period.

## RELIGION AND THE PANTHEON



Detail from the Book of the Dead of Sesostrius depicting the Weighing of the Heart ritual. Dynasty 18.

As we discussed in the History section, the Predynastic and Dynastic periods lasted from approximately 5000 to 332 BCE, after which time Egypt was ruled successively by the Greeks, Romans, and Arabs. Over time, Egyptian religion, mortuary traditions, and worship of gods and goddesses changed dramatically, although some key concepts remained the same. In the section that follows, we explore some of the major Egyptian gods as well as the central religious beliefs of ancient Egypt. We also discuss burial practices, which were deeply rooted in the Egyptian religious belief system.

It is important to understand that ancient Egyptian religion was inextricably linked with the experiences of everyday life. It would have been impossible to be agnostic in ancient Egypt because religion permeated every aspect of life—from medicine, agriculture, and art to astronomy and law. Egyptian religious beliefs arose from the desire to explain and understand the natural world, and stories were developed to explain natural phenomena. For example, the cycle of day and night was believed to be the result of divine actions. Each morning, the sun was thought to ride across the sky in his celestial boat. At dusk, the sky goddess Nut swallowed the sun, only to give birth to it again at dawn.



### IMPORTANT TERMS

Polytheism  
Maat  
Isfet  
Pantheon

Unlike many modern religions, like Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, there is no single text, such as the Bible or the Quran, that explains Egyptian religion. Most of the religious stories come to us from much later Greek and Roman sources. So how do we know what the Egyptians believed and how they worshiped their gods?



### Think Like an Archaeologist

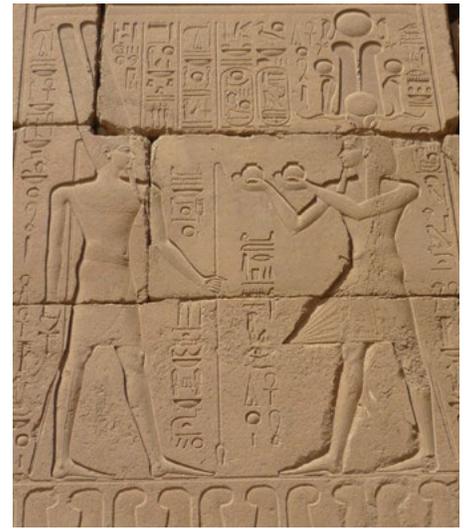
What type of evidence would you look for if you wanted to learn about ancient Egyptian religion, knowing that there is no one source that codifies Egyptian beliefs? By looking at material evidence such as temple reliefs and religious artifacts, we can piece together a picture of what the ancient Egyptians believed and how they worshiped their gods. For example, the presence of hundreds of mummified cats in a temple to Sekhmet or Bastet tells us that mummified cats were part of the worship of those gods and were perhaps used as offerings. Evidence like this, along with temple and pyramid inscriptions and later texts, like those from the Book of the Dead, help inform our understanding of ancient Egyptian religion. If we were to compare ancient Egyptian religion with a contemporary religious belief system, it might be most similar to Hinduism: both are **polytheistic**; in both, images of gods are worshiped in temples; and in both, each god has its own priesthood to celebrate the divine cult, control the temples and access to the gods, and organize festivals in honor of the god.

As discussed in the Government and Social Structures section of this resource guide, ancient Egyptians believed that their king was a god whose duty on earth was to be an intermediary between the state of Egypt and the other immortal gods. His responsibilities included building temples to the major deities, particularly the “state” deities like Amun-Re, and filling these temples with offerings to the gods as well as priests to carry out the necessary daily rituals.

These daily rituals were an integral part of maintaining *maat*, the balance and order of the universe, and ensuring that it did not fall into *isfet*, chaos. It was the chief responsibility of the king to maintain *maat* through the state religion. However, the king was not able to complete all the appropriate religious rituals while also ruling Egypt. The priests of the individual temples therefore conducted rituals on behalf of the king. By maintaining *maat*, the king and the priests were ensuring the continuation of the cosmos. Essentially, the Egyptians and the gods had an agreement: the Egyptian people would perform religious rituals and live a life in *maat*; in return, the gods would protect Egypt’s borders, provide plentiful crops, and protect the health of the people.

### The Pantheon

The word **pantheon** comes from the Greek language and means “all of the gods.” This term is used to describe the group of gods worshiped by a specific people. So the Egyptian pantheon is the group of gods worshiped in ancient Egypt.



Wall relief showing Amun receiving gifts from King Horemheb, from the tenth pylon of the Temple of Amun-Re at Karnak. Dynasty 18.

The core Egyptian pantheon included more than 80 major deities. However, by the end of the Ptolemaic dynasty, more than 1,500 gods and goddesses are attested. Some of these gods were considered to be particularly important, such as those who took part in the creation of the world. Others were minor deities who played small roles in specific rituals, or local deities who had importance only in a certain place. When we think of other polytheistic religions, we often think of the different gods as representing specific natural forces. But this was not necessarily the case with the Egyptian gods. All the gods represented power (the Egyptian word for god, *netjer*, means literally “power”), and some were given attributes associated with specific types of power. For example, Re, the “chief” state god of the Old Kingdom, was associated with overall power and creation, but he was also responsible for ensuring that the sun completed its cycle every day. The gods were depicted in multiple forms—human, animal, or human with the head of an animal. The god Horus, for example, could be depicted as a human, a hawk, or a hawk-headed human. Unlike monotheistic religions, ancient Egyptian belief allowed for the possibility of an infinite number of gods, and it was not unusual for a new deity to be added to the Egyptian pantheon. Some gods were introduced when outsiders settled in Egypt. In such cases, the Egyptians might simply add the newly introduced gods to the Egyptian pantheon. Sometimes, elements of several different deities were combined to create a new one, or an existing Egyptian god took on the attributes of a foreign god. Such blended gods are called syncretic gods.

It would be absurd to try to list all the Egyptian gods in this resource guide, but let’s take a closer look at several of the major deities.

**Amun/Amun-Re:** Amun was a god of “universal power” worshiped throughout Egyptian history. He was often associated with or depicted as a ram. In the Middle Kingdom, Amun was primarily a local god worshiped only at Thebes. Worship of Amun spread in the New Kingdom, when his supporters gained the throne. During this time, some considered him to be the king of the gods and combined him with the god Re, as the god Amun-Re.

**Anubis:** Anubis was alternatively seen as the son of Nephthys and Set, or the son of Nephthys and Osiris. He was the god of embalming and played a key role in the Book of the Dead, assisting with the ceremony in which the heart of the deceased was weighed against the feather of *maat*. In general, Anubis was a protector of the dead and was therefore frequently depicted in funerary art. He was most often represented with the head of a jackal or dog. Some archaeologists believe that Anubis was represented by a canine because they were known to exhume human remains in cemeteries.



Bronze bust of falcon-headed Re with solar disk. Dynasty 26.



Top of a limestone stela depicting a man offering to Amun-Re in ram form. Ptolemaic Period.



Anubis as embalmer, from the painted wooden coffin of Djehutymose. Dynasty 26.



Limestone stela from Amarna showing Akhenaten, his wife Nefertiti, and daughters sitting under the rays of the Aten. Dynasty 18.

**Aten:** Aten, a version of the sun god, was depicted as a sun disk with extended rays that terminate in small hands. The New Kingdom king Amenhotep IV changed his name to Akhenaten to reflect his rejection of Amun and exclusive worship of Aten as supreme deity. When the unpopular Akhenaten died, his son Tutankhaten re-established the worship of Amun and changed his name to Tutankhamun (King Tut) to show that he supported the worship of Amun and the rest of the Egyptian pantheon.

**Bastet/Sekhmet:** Bastet was originally worshiped as a warrior goddess and was depicted with the head of a lion. Eventually, her fierce, militaristic tendencies were transferred to Sekhmet, the lion goddess of Upper Egypt. Bastet was considered a protector of Lower Egypt. Some archaeologists also believe that she was the goddess of healing ointments since she was often depicted on alabaster ointment jars. However, Bastet is most famous for her association with cats. In the Third Intermediate Period, she became known primarily as the goddess of domestic cats. Since cats have large litters, Bastet also became associated with fertility.

**Bes:** Bes was the protector of households, especially women and children. Children often wore amulets of Bes, and Bes figurines were placed inside houses. Bes was often depicted as a bearded dwarf carrying either a musical instrument or a stick or club to kill snakes. Bes drove off evil spirits specifically while women were in labor. He is often depicted with his mother, the goddess Tawaret.

**Hathor:** Hathor was one of Egypt's most important goddesses. She was the daughter of Re, the wife of Horus, and the consort of the king. Hathor was a mother goddess as well as the goddess of foreign lands and foreign goods, such as lapis lazuli and turquoise. She is often depicted as a cow with a sun disk between her horns, or as a woman with a cow's head.



Bronze figure of Bastet. Late Period.



Clay figurine of Bes. Roman Period.



Clay figurine of Hathor. Roman Period.

**Horus:** Horus was sometimes known as a son of Nut and Geb, but more as the son of Isis and Osiris. Horus was a solar deity (related to the sun), and was associated with royalty because of his descent from Isis and Osiris. The king was seen as the mortal embodiment of Horus. The myth of Horus's birth and ascendance to the throne reflected the living king's birth and ascendance to the throne. Horus is often depicted as a falcon or with the head of a falcon. Over time, he was known in multiple forms, including:

- Horus-the-Child (Harpocrates)
- Horus-Son-of-Isis (Hareisis)
- Horus-the-Elder
- Horahkte
- Horus-of-Edfu
- Horus-without-Eyes-in-His-Forehead

**Imentet:** Imentet (also spelled Amentet) was the goddess associated with and personified as the land of the West. She protected burial sites and cemeteries, which tended to be placed west of the Nile. The cardinal direction west, where the sun set every evening, symbolized death to the Egyptians. East symbolized birth, and for this reason most settlements were located east of the Nile. Imentet is depicted with a falcon headdress.

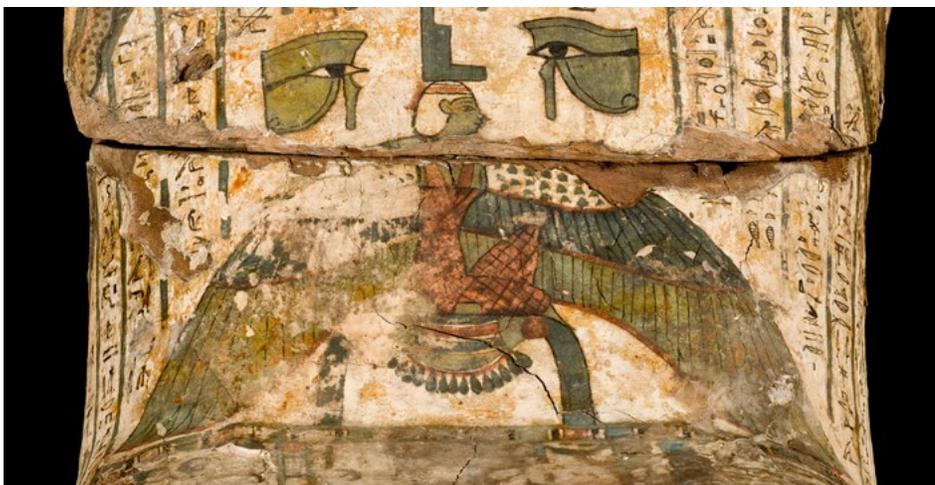
**Isis:** Isis was married to her brother Osiris, with whom she had a son, Horus. She used her powers of magic to resurrect Osiris after he was killed by his brother, Set. In addition to her magical powers, Isis was known as the protector of motherhood, fertility, and the earth. As Osiris's queen, she held a royal position in the pantheon. Isis is depicted either with a throne on her head or wearing the crown of Hathor—a sun disk resting between cow horns. In her human form she is often depicted nursing Horus. She can also take the form of a bird, specifically a kite, or a woman with wings. Worship of Isis spread outside Egypt to the Greek and Roman worlds, where she gained immense popularity. Representations of Isis can be found throughout the Mediterranean basin, including at Pompeii. The Greeks and Romans associated her with their gods Demeter, Aphrodite, and Astarte.



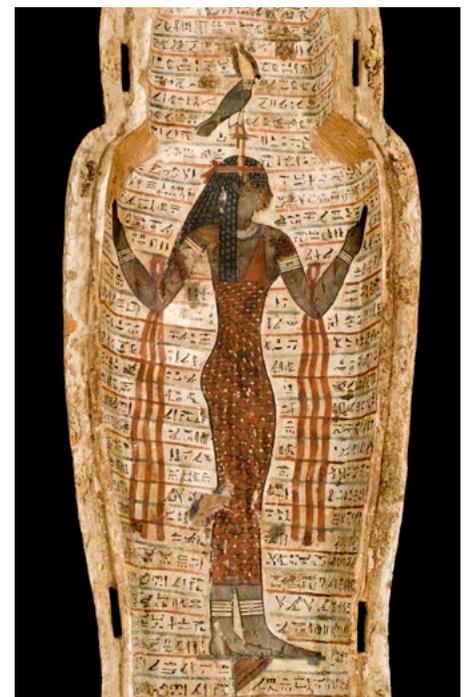
Painted wood figurine of Horus. Dynasty 26.



Clay figurine of Harpocrates riding a ram. Roman Period.



Isis depicted on the coffin of Djehutymose. Dynasty 26.



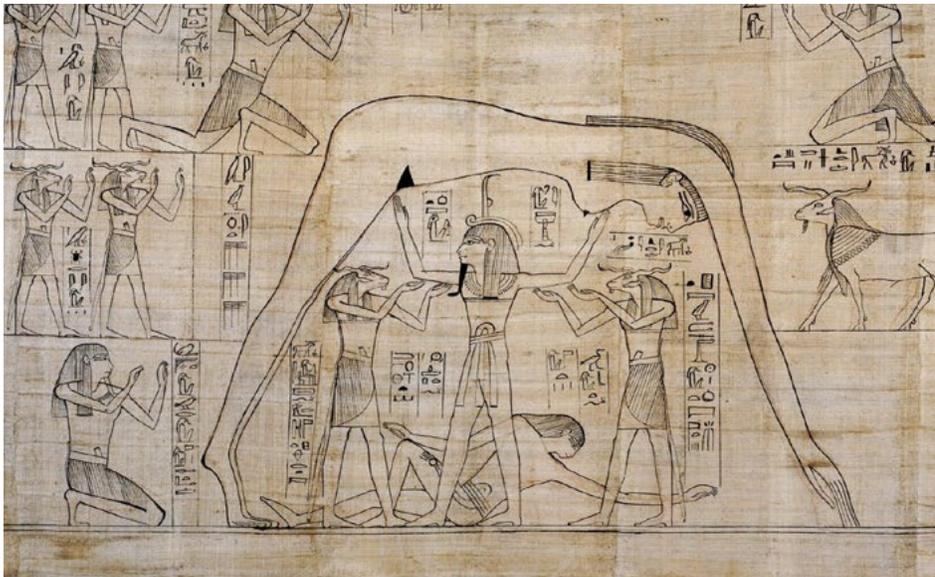
Imentet on the coffin of Djehutymose. Dynasty 26.

**Maat:** *Maat* was both a concept and a goddess. *Maat* was the concept of truth, balance, harmony, and order that must be maintained for the sake of gods, humans, and the cosmos. The king's primary duty was to maintain *maat* through rituals and through just rule. *Maat* was also the goddess of truth, justice, and the ethical and moral principles that Egyptian were expected to uphold. She regulated the stars, seasons, and the actions of gods and humans, and created order out of chaos during the world's creation. *Maat* is symbolized by a single ostrich feather. In the underworld, the hearts of the dead were weighed against this "feather of truth" to determine the fate of the soul of the deceased. The weighing of the heart ritual is discussed in more detail in the Mortuary Practices and Afterlife section of this resource guide.

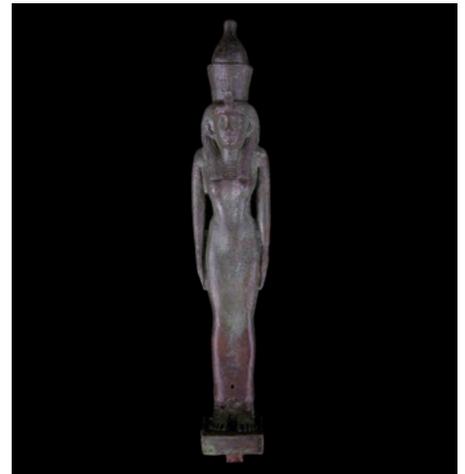
**Mut:** Mut means "mother" in ancient Egyptian. Mut was worshiped at Thebes with her husband, Amun. She was an avenging goddess and is sometimes linked with the war goddess Sekhmet. Mut is usually depicted wearing the double crown of Egypt and sometimes the vulture headdress as well.



Bronze figurine of Maat. Late Period.



A scene from the Book of the Dead depicting Nut as the heavenly canopy above the earth. Third Intermediate Period.



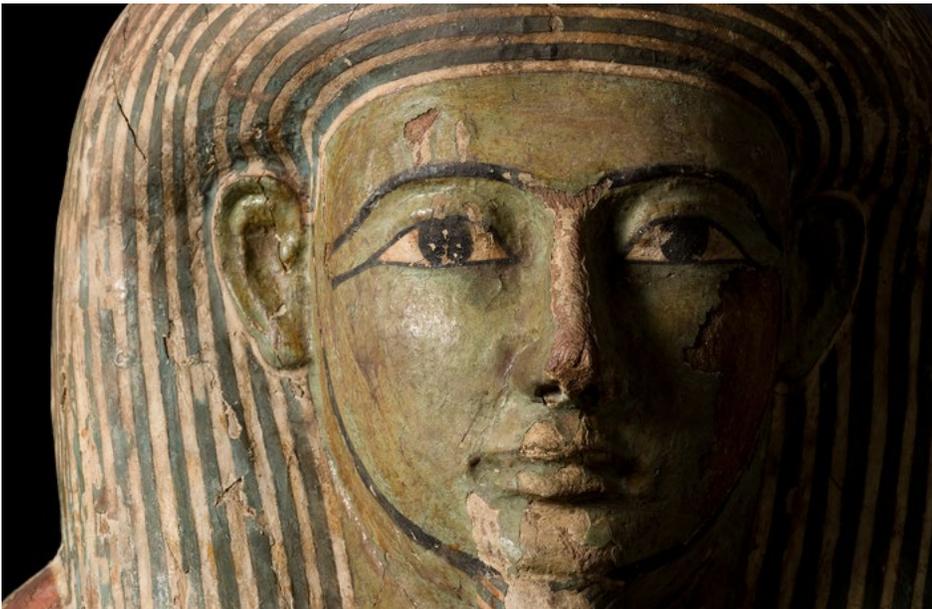
Bronze figurine of Mut. Ptolemaic Period.

**Nut:** Nut was the Egyptian goddess of the sky. According to myth, Nut (the sky) was married to Geb (the earth) and they had the following children: Isis, Osiris, Set, and Nephthys. Nut was believed to be the literal vault of heaven and is depicted in Egyptian art as the embodied curve of the sky. When in human form, she is often naked or wearing a dress adorned with stars. It was believed that Nut swallowed the disk of the sun every day at dusk and gave birth to it at dawn.

**Osiris:** According to Egyptian myth, Osiris was both the first king and the first mummy. When he died, he was buried at Abydos and became the ruler of the underworld and the god of agricultural fertility. Osiris is depicted as a green-skinned person wrapped in white mummy bandages. He wears the *atef* crown and his hands emerge from his mummy wrappings to hold the crook and flail of kingship.



Grain mummy of Osiris in coffin. Third Intermediate Period-Late Period.



Idealized face of the deceased on the Djehuty-mose coffin. Dynasty 26.



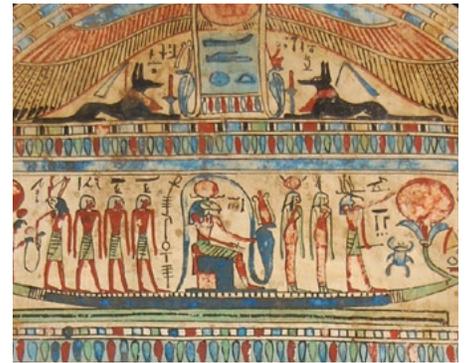
Stone figurine of Ptah. Dynasty 26.

There are many versions of the myth that relates how Osiris became a mummy. In one version, Osiris fought with his brother, Set. During the fight, Set killed Osiris, cutting his body into many pieces and scattering them across Egypt. As Set laid claim to the throne of Egypt, Osiris's wife and sister, Isis, gathered the pieces of her husband's body. Using her magical powers and with the help of Thoth and Anubis, Isis reassembled Osiris's body and wrapped it in linen, thus creating the first mummy. Isis lay with her restored husband and conceived a son, Horus, the rightful king of Egypt, who removed Set from power. Osiris, unable to stay in the mortal world, became the ruler of Duat, the realm of the dead, while Horus ruled as the living king of Egypt. A reenactment of the cycle of myths recounting Osiris's death and resurrection was performed over a number of days at the annual Osiris festival at Abydos.

By the Middle Kingdom, ancient Egyptians believed that, after death, if they successfully passed the moment of judgment in the Hall of Judgment, they would become one with Osiris in the afterlife. Mummy masks and the faces on coffins are often painted green to show that the deceased has been unified with Osiris.

**Ptah:** Ptah was a creator god and the central god of Memphis. He was the patron of material creation and crafts and was known as the sculptor of the earth. Ptah is shown in human form, often mummified, wearing a blue cap and holding a staff. The Memphite Theology, written in the 13th century BCE, offers a version of the creation story in which Ptah brought forth the world by naming all of its aspects and created deities by speaking their names.

**Re:** The sun god Re was Egypt's most important god since he was associated with the creation and continuation of the world. He is often depicted as a raptor, or a man with the head of a raptor. During the New Kingdom, he became syncretized with Amun to create the all-powerful Amun-Re.



Detail from a painted wood stela depicting Re in the solar boat. Ptolemaic Period.

**Set:** Son of Geb and Nut, brother of Osiris, Isis, and Nephthys, Set was the god of chaos, the desert, and storms. He is depicted as what is known as the “Set animal,” which is a combination of dog, donkey, aardvark, and maybe even a fish. For more about Set’s role in the Osiris Myth, see under Osiris, above.

**Sobek:** Sobek was the crocodile god of fertility and military prowess. He was a protector god, safeguarding people especially against the dangers of the Nile River (such as crocodiles). There were several different crocodile gods in the ancient Egypt pantheon, including Pnephorus and Petesouchos. Offerings to these gods often took the form of crocodile mummies.

**Tawaret:** Tawaret was a protective goddess of childbirth and fertility. She was depicted as a female hippopotamus that walked upright and had the back and tail of a Nile crocodile. Her fierce expression symbolized how ferociously she was thought to protect mothers giving birth.



Limestone stela depicting a man worshipping Set. Dynasty 19.



Toth depicted on the Djehutmose coffin. Dynasty 26.

**Toth:** Toth was a lunar god who was associated with writing and learning. He was known as the scribe of the gods. He is often depicted as a man with the head of an ibis or sometimes a baboon.



Bronze figurine of Sobek. Ptolemaic Period–Late Period.



Faience amulet of Tawaret. Ptolemaic period.

**Serapis:** Serapis was a Graeco-Egyptian syncretic deity, a combination of the Egyptian gods Osiris and Apis and several Greek gods such as Hades, Demeter, and Dionysus. He was associated with the underworld (like the gods Hades and Osiris), rebirth (like Dionysus and Apis), and fertility (like Demeter and Apis). Serapis was introduced by the Greek ruler Ptolemy I as a way of unifying Greeks and Egyptians. In general, Greeks had a great distaste for Egyptian deities because they were depicted as being part animal and part human. Serapis is usually shown wearing a *modius* (grain measure) crown. To the Greeks, the *modius* represented the land of the dead.

**Ptah-Sokar-Osiris:** Ptah-Sokar-Osiris, as you might be able to guess based on the name, was a composite god. He was a combination of Ptah, the creator god and patron of crafts; Sokar, the falcon god of Memphis; and Osiris, god and chief judge of the dead. He was a funerary deity who specifically cared for the dead.



Bronze figurine of Serapis. Roman Period.



Painted wood figurine of Ptah-Sokar-Osiris. Dynasty 26.

# MORTUARY PRACTICES AND THE AFTERLIFE



Mummy in the Royal Ontario Museum.

In this section, we address ancient Egyptian mortuary practices and beliefs about the afterlife. These are inextricably linked with the religious beliefs and gods addressed in the section about Religion and the Pantheon.

What first draws many of us to ancient Egypt is its amazing sites such as the pyramids or its fascinating remains such as mummies. In fact, if I asked you (or if you asked your class) to describe ancient Egypt with three to four objects, your answer would likely include pyramids, mummies, hieroglyphs, and maybe the Nile or the Sphinx. But what do these things have in common, and what do they mean in terms of the history and culture of the ancient Egyptians?

## The Afterlife

The terms we just listed—pyramids, mummies, hieroglyphs, the Nile—all relate to one thing: death. Pyramids were tombs where the mummies of great kings were buried. The chambers inside the pyramids were covered in hieroglyphic texts that celebrated the deeds of the deceased and addressed the gods in words of prayer for the afterlife. Even the Nile represented death in its annual



## IMPORTANT TERMS

- Mummification
- Canopic Jars
- Natron
- Amulet
- Wedjat
- Ushabti
- Ba
- Ka
- Duat
- Pyramid
- Mastaba

cycle of flooding and subsequent drought. In fact, most of the artifacts that survive from ancient Egypt were found in tombs and other funerary complexes. With all of this focus on death, one might think that the ancient Egyptians were obsessed with it. However, quite the opposite was true. The Egyptians were preoccupied with life and life after death.

The ancient Egyptians believed that if they had lived a life of *maat*, after they died they would go on a journey through the underworld with the potential to be resurrected in an eternal afterlife. This afterlife was a mirror of their former life, and they would therefore need food, clothing, transportation, jewelry, makeup, and even servants. This is why we find so many grave goods in ancient Egyptian tombs—they are the deceased individual's preparation for the afterlife.

This is where mummies come into play. It was believed that the body needed to be entombed properly for the deceased to be able to complete the arduous journey through the underworld (the **Duat**) and to enjoy the afterlife. It was important that the physical body remain in the tomb as an anchor to which the deceased's *ba*, or life force, could return. The *ba* is discussed in detail later in this section. The process of mummification, or preservation through desiccation, preserved the bodies of the ancient Egyptians for the afterlife.

### Mummification

The process of **mummification** was fairly straightforward, though there seems to have been some variation in its actual practice. After an individual died, specialists removed the body's internal organs through a cut made in the left side of the abdomen. The lungs, stomach, intestines, and liver were saved and stored in **canopic jars**, while the heart (as the seat of reason) remained in the body. The brain was removed through the nostrils by a wooden or metal hook inserted up through the sinuses.



Limestone canopic jars. Late Period.

## THE BOOK OF THE DEAD



Detail of hieroglyphs inside the Djehutmose coffin. Dynasty 26.

The collection of spells known as the Book of the Dead is better translated from ancient Egyptian as the Book of Coming Forth By Day. Things to know:

1. It's not really a book but rather a collection of different short texts composed over a long period of time. These are related to earlier texts called Coffin Texts and Pyramid Texts, which were originally written (you guessed it) in coffins and pyramids.
2. There is no one canonical text. Individuals seem to have been able to pick the spells that they wanted in their own personal version. During the Saite (26th) Dynasty, the Book of the Dead was standardized.
3. It both describes how the individual gets to the afterlife and also offers spells and passwords to assist the deceased in their journey. Think of it kind of like instructions or cheat codes in a video game.



Watch an Artifact Exploration video about mummification.

[youtu.be/R1OBkkNewLE](https://youtu.be/R1OBkkNewLE)

The body was then packed with **natron**, a combination of soda ash, baking soda, and table salt. This mixture desiccated the body, removing its moisture and thus preserving it. Once the body was desiccated, the natron mixture was removed and the body was washed, anointed, and wrapped in linen bandages. This mimicked the actions of Isis, Thoth, and Anubis when they reassembled the body of Osiris to create the first mummy. **Amulets** were often added to the mummy wrappings over specific parts of the body. The body was then laid in a coffin, which was itself sometimes nested in a sarcophagus. On the 70th day after death—an astrologically significant day—the coffin was placed in the burial chamber or tomb. Coffins and tomb walls were often inscribed with spells and prayers that would help the deceased on their journey through the Duat. These spells, known as Coffin Texts and Pyramid Texts, are today collectively known as the Book of the Dead.

Archaeologists find mummies of different varieties. Sometimes mummies are filled with wads of linen bandages (perhaps to “plump up” the body). Some mummies still contain organs, while others have no organs at all. Some mummy wrappings include many amulets, some don’t have any. Herodotus, the Greek geographer who traveled extensively throughout the Mediterranean region in the 5th century BCE, described the mummification process in detail and mentions that there were ideal and less than ideal ways of embalming a body for preservation.

### What Is an Amulet?

Amulets are small objects made from common or precious materials that are worn as protection or that symbolically represent an idea, wish, or spell. In ancient Egypt, amulets were commonly buried with mummies but were also often worn by the living as jewelry. Amulets placed within the layers of mummy wrappings were thought to protect the deceased on their journey through the underworld and provide luck and protection in the afterlife.

Let’s take a look at some types of amulets that were wrapped in the linens during the mummification process.

#### *Wedjat*

The **wedjat**, or Eye of Horus, was an important symbol in ancient Egypt. In life, it was worn as an amulet to help keep the wearer healthy and heal them when sick. In death, the *wedjat* was placed over the incisions through which the body’s internal organs were removed. It was believed that the *wedjat* healed the wound so that the body would be healthy and whole in the afterlife.



### THINK LIKE AN ARCHAEOLOGIST

What do you think we can learn from the fact that the quality of mummification varied? Perhaps it indicates that some people could afford the higher-quality mummification process, while others could not. It does tell us that, regardless of social status and wealth, mummification was important and that the afterlife was available for everyone. These beliefs were widespread and important to all Egyptians, not just the wealthy and royal.



Faience *wedjat* amulet. Third Intermediate Period.

### Heart Scarab

A scarab amulet was typically placed over the heart during mummification. The scarab was inscribed with a spell from the Book of the Dead which was intended to prevent the deceased from incriminating themselves on their journey through the underworld and in the Hall of Judgment.

### Djed Pillar

The *djed* pillar is one of the most ancient symbols in Egypt. It is commonly understood to represent the spine of Osiris, god of the dead. In hieroglyphs, the symbol represents stability. During mummification, a *djed* pillar amulet was often placed along the spine of the deceased to ensure resurrection. The Book of the Dead includes a spell to be spoken for the dead so they can regain the use of their spine.

### Ankh

The *ankh* was the symbol for life. It is commonly depicted in the hands of gods and kings and represents their ability to sustain life. Amulets in the shape of the *ankh* were placed anywhere on the body and ensured the well-being of the deceased in the afterlife.

### Ushabti

While often placed in tombs with other grave goods, small *ushabti* (or *shabti*) were sometimes wrapped in the linens of the mummy. These figurines represented servants or slaves who would serve the deceased person in the afterlife. Spells inscribed on the ushabtis allowed them to come to life to perform tasks such as cooking, cleaning, laundry, and working in the fields.

### The Ba and Ka

The Egyptians believed that you needed to have a body in good, recognizable shape to successfully arrive in the afterlife. This was important because they believed your soul/spirit was made of two parts, one of which, the *ba*, was housed in your mummified body. The *ba* was the part of your soul that maintained a connection between the afterlife and the living world. It could leave the body to receive offerings from friends and family who visited your tomb. If your body decayed or was damaged, your *ba* would lack a physical home, but the ancient Egyptians had a way around this. A statuette of the deceased placed in the tomb could also house the *ba*, as could a wall painting or even just the written name of the deceased. In Egyptian funerary art, the *ba* was often depicted as a bird with a human head.



Stone heart scarab inscribed with a spell from the Book of the Dead. Third Intermediate Period.



Stone *djed* pillar amulet. New Kingdom–Late Period.



Gold *ankh* amulet. Roman Period.



Faience *ushabti*. Late Period.



The *ba* depicted as a human-headed falcon on the coffin of Djehutymose. Dynasty 26.

The *ka* was the part of your soul that needed a body and “stuff” in the afterlife. The *ka* was your physical double, the mirror of yourself in the afterlife. Because of this, the *ka* required all the necessities of life, including food, drink, a bed, and entertainment. Items from the following categories were necessary for the *ka*:

- Food
- Clothing
- Jewelry
- Makeup
- Grooming
- Furniture
- Entertainment
- Servants/enslaved workers
- Fertility figures (if help with this was desired)

### The Journey to the Afterlife

Ancient Egyptians prepared for the afterlife over the course of their lives. They tried to live in harmony with *maat*, and perhaps gathered some of the necessities of the afterlife. When they died, their relatives had them mummified and placed in a tomb with grave goods. Now the hard part began. After the burial, the deceased had to make the perilous journey to the afterlife. If unsuccessful, their soul would be devoured and they would die a final death.

The first stage in the journey through the underworld was the Opening of the Mouth ceremony. This was an important step because, as would be the case in the afterlife, the deceased needed to breathe, talk, and eat. The Opening of the Mouth ritual was often painted on tomb walls, as well as on later papyrus documents depicting scenes from the Book of the Dead.

## ANIMAL MUMMIES



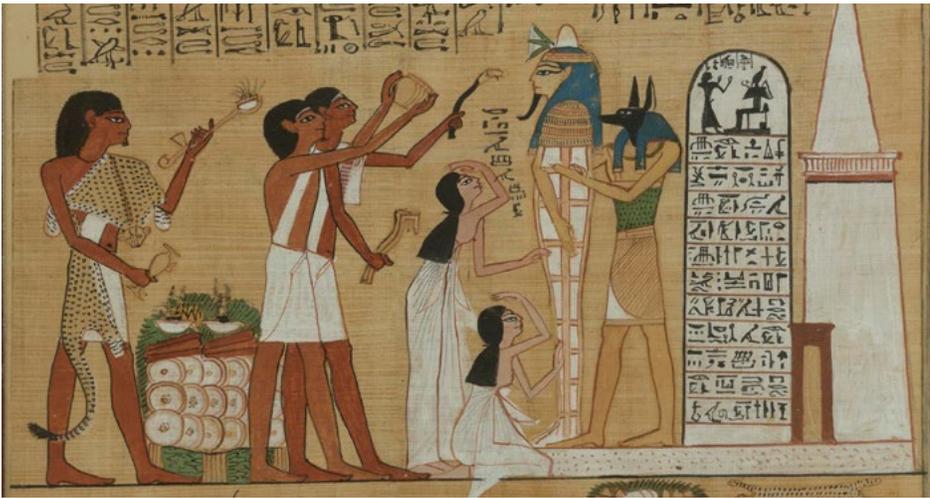
Cat mummy. Roman Period.

Did you know that the ancient Egyptians also mummified animals? Animals were mummified in Egypt for several reasons:

1. Animals were ritually killed and mummified in temples as votive messengers to ask for favor from particular gods.
2. Sacred animals associated with a particular deity (especially bulls for Apis) were mummified and formally buried after their death.
3. Animals were sometimes mummified and put in tombs to be food for the deceased.
4. Occasionally, pets were mummified and placed in the burials of the deceased so they could live with their humans in the afterlife.

Some animals were actually embalmed, while others were merely wrapped and dipped in resin. Votive animals were probably bred for this purpose. Making fake animal mummies of random bones, sticks, dirt, or bits of broken pottery was very common.

Some gods and their sacred animals:  
Bastet: cats; Thoth: baboons and ibis;  
Anubis: dogs; Horus: hawks; Apis: bulls; Sobek: crocodiles.



Opening of the Mouth ceremony, from the Book of the Dead of Hunefer. New Kingdom.

With the jackal-headed Anubis as a guide, the deceased traveled through the underworld and arrived in the Hall of Maat. Here they faced 42 different gods before whom they would have to make a negative confession. A negative confession included a recitation of all the sins the deceased did not commit during their lifetime. For example, the deceased might say, “I did not steal,” “I did not lie,” or “I did not cheat.” If they were deemed to be truthful and pure, they were then permitted to stand before Osiris for the Weighing of the Heart. But what if the deceased had stolen or cheated during their lifetime? They didn’t need to worry so long as they were carrying a heart scarab amulet. The spell inscribed on the amulet would keep the deceased’s heart from betraying them and enable them to pass through the Hall of Maat successfully.



Weighing of the Heart, from the Book of the Dead of Hunefer. New Kingdom.

The Weighing of the Heart was the final stage of the journey to the afterlife. When the deceased reached the Hall of Judgment, their heart was weighed against a single ostrich feather—the symbol of Maat, the goddess of truth and justice. A pure heart was equal in weight or lighter than the feather. Ammit the Devourer crouched nearby, ready to devour the deceased’s soul if it didn’t pass the test. If that happened, death was final. If the deceased passed the test, they would join Osiris in the eternal afterlife.



Watch an Artifact Exploration video about Egyptian grave goods.

[youtu.be/WZOy\\_7ayvBM](https://youtu.be/WZOy_7ayvBM)



## Think Like an Archaeologist

How do we know about ancient Egyptian beliefs about death? Burials and references to death and funerary practices in literature, letters, and collections of magical spells (such as the Book of the Dead) are all valuable resources for archaeologists.

Burials themselves are important sources of information about Egyptian funerary practices and beliefs about death. Archaeologists look for the following information:

- Shape, size, location, and decoration of the burial/grave
- Position of the human remains
- Whether or not multiple individuals share the same burial site
- The human remains themselves, which can reveal valuable medical information
- Artifacts purposefully deposited with the deceased as well as animal and plant remains
- Inscriptions and sculpture
- Evidence of long-term family attention to the burial site, of ancient reuse of the burial site, or of looting

What type of information do you think archaeologists get from looking at this information?

## Pyramids and Funerary Temples

The **pyramid** is, without a doubt, the most iconic symbol of ancient Egypt. But what was the purpose of these stone buildings? In order to answer that question, we must first look at burial practices from ancient Egypt.

Functionally and symbolically, burials in Egypt had two parts: the burial below the ground and the above-ground structure for worshiping or attending to the dead. (It was also used by the deceased to continue their rituals in the after-life.) The most famous above-ground tomb structures from Egypt are the pyramids at Giza.

While burials and cemeteries for the elite changed over time, the notion of distinct private (below ground) and public (above ground) burial structures remained consistent throughout Egyptian history. Changes in burials that did occur reflect changing ideas about the power of the king, the relationships between non-royal elites and the gods, and attempts to conceal and protect the dead from decay and tomb robbers.

The earliest tombs from the Predynastic Period were simple. They consisted of a tomb in which to place the body and grave goods, as well as dirt mounded on top to distinguish it from the surrounding landscape. However, as time passed, kings began to build structures on top of their tombs. At first, these structures took the form of raised rectangular platforms, called **mastabas**.



Watch an Artifact Exploration video about the coffin of Djehutymose.

[youtu.be/-EGgi1sBjjs](https://youtu.be/-EGgi1sBjjs)

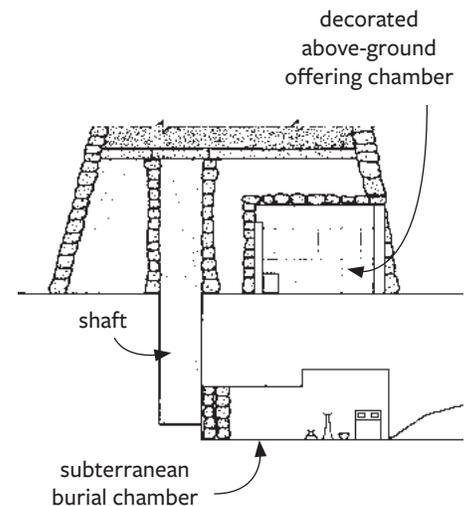


Diagram of a mastaba tomb.

Eventually, mastabas developed into pyramids, beginning with King Djoser's Step Pyramid in the 3rd Dynasty. This was also the first time that funerary temples or chapels were constructed for the purpose of the king's funeral, or for the king to use as he continued to perform the important rituals he performed in life.



A mastaba tomb at Saqqara. Dynasty 4.

Pyramid use and construction changed throughout the course of Egyptian history. During the intermediate periods, there were few major construction projects and no pyramids or funerary temples were built. At the beginning of the 5th Dynasty, small pyramids were constructed from mudbrick (these are poorly preserved). Beginning in the New Kingdom, ornate stone funerary temples and complexes were built, while the tombs of kings and elites were located in rock-cut tombs in the Valley of the Kings.



### Think Like an Archaeologist

Why do you think funerary practices changed over time? What might a change in building materials indicate?

The use of cheaper building materials, like mudbrick, and the construction of smaller pyramids indicate that the person who directed the building project had less power than those who built larger stone funerary structures, such as the pyramids at Giza. Smaller, less skilled workforces were needed to build these smaller, cheaper structures.



Step Pyramid of Djoser, Saqqara. Dynasty 3.

## WRITING IN ANCIENT EGYPT



Hieroglyphic inscription from the Temple of Hathor, Dendera. Ptolemaic–Roman Periods.

Egyptian hieroglyphs are one of the most recognizable symbols of ancient Egypt. They covered papyrus documents, the walls of pyramids and temples, and even the insides of coffins. In this section, we discuss the advent of the different writing systems for the Egyptian language and their various uses. We'll also learn the basics of how to read hieroglyphs.

It is important to understand that the hieroglyphic script is not a language. It is one of the writing systems used to write the Egyptian language. A writing system is a way to represent verbal communication visually. There are several different types of writing systems. The English language, along with Spanish, French, and Russian, for example, use an alphabet system. In alphabet systems, each symbol (letter) represents a sound. Systems in which symbols represent different syllables are called syllabaries. Examples of syllabaries include the Japanese writing systems of hiragana and katakana, Cherokee, cuneiform, Mayan script, and Linear B (Mycenaean Greek). A third type of writing system is called logography. It is a concept/idea-based system, where each symbol represents a word, morpheme (a word element, like “-ing”), or other semantic unit. Examples of logographic systems include Kanji (used in Japan), Chinese characters, some hieroglyphs, and some cuneiform symbols.



### IMPORTANT TERMS

Hieroglyphs  
Hieratic  
Demotic  
Papyrus

There were two primary systems for writing the ancient Egyptian language. The first and most well known is **hieroglyphs**. The first evidence for hieroglyphs are the labels from Dynasty 0 tombs at Abydos, dated to about 3100 BCE. However, it is possible that hieroglyphs may have been in use even before this. It seems that hieroglyphs developed around the same time as cuneiform, a syllabary system used in ancient Mesopotamia. Middle East archaeologists claim that cuneiform was developed first, while Egyptologists maintain that hieroglyphs were first. Most likely, both systems developed simultaneously.

Hieroglyphs are a combination of logograms (a symbol represents a word), ideograms (a symbol represents an idea), and phonetic signs (a symbol represents a sound). Hieroglyphs were used strictly in sacred or royal contexts. They adorned the tombs and coffins of kings, as well as the funerary temple complexes that kings built to serve their gods in the afterlife.

The symbols that make up hieroglyphs tend to be objects of daily life and those from the natural world. Common symbols include body parts, like legs, hands, and even a heart, alongside many animal species. There are also symbols such as boats, flag poles, plants, and human figures. We can learn a lot about how the ancient Egyptians understood their world by looking at what the different hieroglyphic symbols mean. What do you think it means that so many of the symbols in hieroglyphs are from the natural world? What can that tell us about the ancient Egyptians?

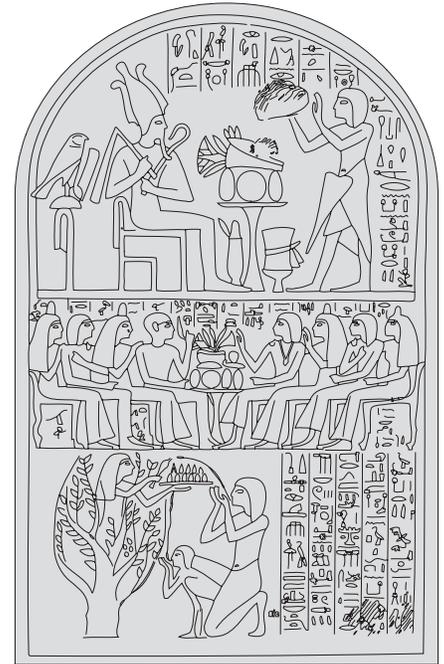
Throughout Egypt's Dynastic Period (3100–332 BCE), there were around 800 symbols in use. By the Hellenistic Period (332–30 BCE), there were over 5,000 symbols. Why do you think there were so many more symbols in the Hellenistic Period? New symbols were developed in order to represent the new concepts, gods, and international relationships introduced to Egypt during this time.

### Classroom Activity/Projector Activity:

#### Let's learn to read some hieroglyphs

The large object pictured on the next page was once part of a tomb. It is a fragment of a “false door”—the image of a door that was carved or painted on the wall of a tomb. False doors did not actually open, but served as portals between the worlds of the living and the dead. The *ba*, or life spirit of the deceased person, could exit and enter the tomb through the false door. It was also where the deceased received offerings left by living relatives.

This false door fragment is from the tomb of a man named Qar. He was an important administrator under King Pepy I during the 6th Dynasty (2407–2260 BCE), and he was buried at Saqqara. What kind of symbols do you see? Animals, body parts, shapes of tools, musical instruments? But how are these hieroglyphs read? Right to left? Left to right? Top to bottom? Bottom to top? Let's take a closer look to find out.



Top: Fragment of a limestone votive stela showing Osiris. Dynasty 18. Below: a drawing of a similar stela, showing what the Kelsey fragment may originally have looked like.



Watch an Artifact Exploration video about Egyptian hieroglyphs.

[youtu.be/\\_p9rjfTmJ\\_0](https://youtu.be/_p9rjfTmJ_0)

Hieroglyphs are always read from top to bottom but, depending on the context, they can be read from right to left or from left to right. We can tell which direction we should read by looking at the animal and human figures, which always face toward the beginning of the text. Do the figures on Qar's false door panel face toward the right or toward the left? The animal hieroglyphs and Qar himself, who is the large figure at the bottom, are all facing toward the right. So the right column is read first, top to bottom, then the left column, top to bottom. Oftentimes, especially on doors like this one, the animals and figures all face the center; the ancient Egyptians really liked symmetry.

On the magnified portion of the inscription, do you see the vertical oval with the straight line along its bottom? This symbol is called a cartouche and it was used to indicate a royal or divine name. Do you see the repeating symbols inside the cartouche? The bundle of sticks is "P" and the feather is "Eh" or "Ee." So from right to left, top to bottom, it reads "P-Eh P-Ee" or "Pepy," that is, King Pepy I.

Above the cartouche, do you see the stringed instrument that looks a bit like a guitar? That is the symbol for *nfr* or "beloved." There are no vowels in this symbol, but Egyptologists believe it is pronounced "nefer." Put these two elements together and you get "Pepy-Nefer," which means "beloved of Pepy."

Do you see the snake above *nfr*? This symbol represents the concept of a nickname. Above that is the name of the owner of the tomb, Qar. His name is made up of the symbols bird, mouth, and bucket. You can see this repeated at the bottom of the right column. So, taken all together, this section of the text reads: "Qar, who is nicknamed Beloved of Pepy." This tells us that Qar was an important figure in Pepy I's administration. Not everyone had permission to include the king's name on their tomb, and Qar was even called "beloved of Pepy."



False door panel of Qar, also known as Pepy-Nefer. Dynasty 6.

The other writing system used in ancient Egypt is called **hieratic**. Hieratic comes from the Greek word meaning "of the priests," and it refers to the Egyptian writing system that was associated with religion, royalty, and the state. Hieratic is thought to have developed by at least the 5th Dynasty as a cursive version of hieroglyphs. This system would certainly allow for faster note-taking than hieroglyphs. It was a shorthand used mostly by scribes and priests for things like inventory lists, letters, and legal documents that did not require all the formality of hieroglyphs. It was also used for sacred writings, like papyrus versions of the Book of the Dead. Hieratic was written on papyrus, parchment, pottery, and wooden boards using a reed brush and ink. It could be written horizontally or vertically, but always right to left, never left to right.



Hieratic writing on a fragment of the Book of the Dead. Late Period.

By the 11th century BCE, hieratic evolved into a writing system called **demotic**. Demotic was a less formal writing system and was used by common people (the Greek word *demos* means “people”). It was usually written on papyrus, parchment, pottery, and wooden boards in ink with reed brush, but it could also appear on monuments carved in stone (such as the Rosetta Stone; see below). Demotic was used for legal, administrative, and commercial purposes, as well as for sacred writings. It was read horizontally from right to left with no variation in directionality.

### Deciphering Hieroglyphs

For centuries, scholars of ancient Egypt attempted to understand the mysterious symbols that adorned the tombs and temples that they were exploring. However, it wasn't until the Rosetta Stone was discovered, in 1799, that they made any real headway. The Rosetta Stone is a large stela that dates to 196 BCE. Inscribed on its surface are three parallel versions of a royal decree: one written in Egyptian hieroglyphs, one in demotic, and one in ancient Greek. Scholars were able to translate the Greek version and, through that, were able to make connections with the hieroglyphic and demotic scripts. Even so, it would take more than 20 years to fully decipher the Egyptian writing systems.

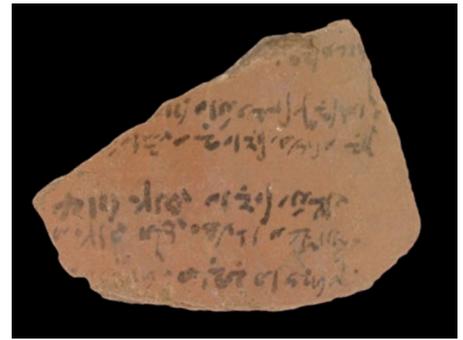
### Scribes and Literacy

As we saw in the Government and Social Structures section, scribes were highly trained and elite members of ancient Egyptian society. Scribes began training at the age of four, attending schools associated with temples, palaces, and government offices. They learned by first memorizing characters and phrases, then copying excerpts from classical literature that were read aloud to them. We know this because many of the surviving school texts contain misspelled or varied spellings of words and messy or missing phrases from well-known literature. In the 16th century BCE, Egypt was an important player on the international stage and corresponded frequently with Mesopotamian kingdoms. During this period, some scribes learned to read and write cuneiform in addition to Egyptian hieroglyphs and hieratic. Tribal training was considered complete by age 16. At that point, an aspiring scribe took an apprenticeship with a master scribe.

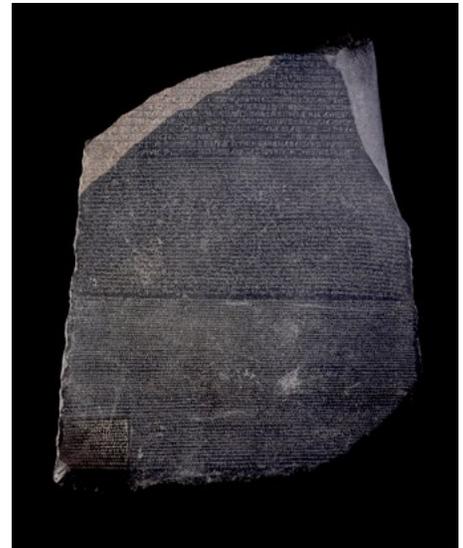
Scribes also needed to learn to make their own papyrus, inks, and to trim their own reed pens.

### Papyrus

The term **papyrus** refers both to a reed that grows abundantly along the Nile River as well as the paper made from it. To make paper, papyrus reeds were harvested while they were still green. The outer rind of the papyrus stalk was removed and the inner pith cut lengthwise into thin strips. These fibrous strips were laid lengthwise side by side, and a second layer was laid crosswise on top. The layers were then hammered together and then pressed and allowed to dry, forming a stiff paper.



Clay ostrakon with demotic writing.  
Third Intermediate Period–Roman Period.



The Rosetta Stone. Ptolemaic Period.



Miniature papyrus book. Roman Period.

### *Ink (or pigment)*

Ink, or pigment, for writing came in two colors: black and red. Black ink was usually made from soot that was created by burning oil in a lamp. Red ink was made from red ochre. Both colors took the form of either a powder or dried cakes. To use the ink, the scribe needed to dip his pen in a little water and use it to moisten the ink, which could then be applied to the papyrus to create the document.

### *Reed pen*

The pens used by Egyptian scribes were also made from reeds. During the Dynastic periods, the scribe would chew the fibers at one end of the reed to create a brush that he would then dip in ink. In the Hellenistic Period, scribes used a split and sharpened reed, much like a quill pen.

Scribes were not the only literate people in Egypt. There is evidence that people from various levels of society could read to some extent. Basic literacy was required of administrators and officials. Even some workmen were expected to be able to read certain names to remove them from inscriptions. Scribal school was open to anyone who could afford it, and literacy was viewed as a way of gaining status and rising in the social ranks. Estimates suggest about 1 percent of the population was literate in Dynastic Egypt and 10 percent under the Greeks and Romans. The increase in literacy under Greek and Roman rule was due to the fact that hieratic and demotic scripts were more commonly used during these periods; these scripts required much less training to master compared with hieroglyphs.



Paint box containing writing implements and pigments. Roman Period.



Reed stylus. Roman Period.

# ART IN ANCIENT EGYPT



Painted ceilings at the Theban Necropolis.

When you think about ancient Egyptian art, what is it that makes you go, “Ah, that’s Egyptian!”

In this section, we look at the different types of ancient Egyptian art. We’ll discuss where these types of art occur and what each one can tell us about the ancient Egyptians.

It is important to remember that in ancient Egypt, art functioned as a tool of the religious system. Every object, whether a painting or a sculpture, was a representation of the ideal form of that object. Pieces of art were meant to stand in for the real thing in the afterlife. Egyptian art was not art for art’s sake, but art with purpose. The purpose was to convey the most perfect, ideal form. This is why Egyptian art changes very little across history.

By the end of the Predynastic Period, Egyptians had begun to establish a canon, or set of rules, for how to depict the human form. Evidence for the Egyptian canon begins in the Old Kingdom and includes unfinished sculptures of human figures that are covered in grid lines. These grid lines, applied



Detail from the false door of Qar. Dynasty 6.

directly on stone with red paint, were intended to guide the carving of each figure. According to the Egyptian canon, a standing human figure should be divided into 18 equal units with the width of each unit being approximately the size of the figure's fist. The grid lines were used to measure the distances between eight key points on the body which needed to maintain strict proportion in order to achieve the ideal form.



Wooden drawing board with red grid lines. Dynasty 18.

Human figures drawn according to the Egyptian canon stand with their legs, feet, and face in profile, their chest and shoulders in a frontal pose, and their eyes frontal. Try standing like this and looking in the mirror. Is it a natural pose?

Rather than looking at the figure as a whole, look at each body part. One theory suggests Egyptian artists drew each part of the body individually, so as to make it more legible to viewers and more easily rendered during the sculpting or painting process. For example, a foot in profile is easier to draw and understand than a foot seen from the front. However, this theory negates the creativity of artists and the cultural world in which they lived. The particular way in which Egyptian figures were produced can be explained by the fact that Egyptians wanted each body part rendered in its most ideal state and that each part would be instantly recognizable. These figures may look awkward to us, but to an ancient Egyptian, each body part was viewed as beautiful and signifying the whole individual.

**Suggested Activity:** Self Portrait Using Egyptian Canon.



Painted wood model of a butchering scene. Middle Kingdom.



Limestone funerary stela with Greek inscription. Roman Period.

## CREATE YOUR OWN NILE FLOODPLAIN

*Iteru*, as the ancient Egyptians called the Nile River, was a central part of Egyptian daily life and culture. Its annual inundation brought fresh water and nutrient-rich soil to the desert, transforming it into a fertile floodplain. The Nile was also an important avenue for transportation and trade, and provided natural resources used for food, housing, and clothing.

The annual flooding the ancient Egyptians relied on to flood their fields and fill irrigation canals, dikes, and reservoirs was successful because the Nile formed a convex floodplain. The land was highest along the banks of the Nile, sloping gradually away as it stretched out toward the desert.

In this activity, students recreate the conditions along the Nile and demonstrate how a convex floodplain works.

### **Materials:**

- Shallow plastic container or disposable aluminum roasting dish. Container should be at least 4 inches deep.
- Book (one inch thick)
- Towel
- Potting soil
- Aluminum foil or plastic cling wrap
- Grass seed (check sprouting time; choose seeds that sprout in 1 to 2 weeks)
- Small pebbles
- Water
- Optional: small plastic animals such as hippos, crocodiles, camels, etc.

### **Instructions:**

1. Place the book on a flat surface with exposure to sunlight and cover with a towel.
2. Prop one of the short edges of the container on the book.
3. Fill the container with potting soil to one inch below the edge of the container.
4. Excavate a central trench lengthwise in the pan. Pile the excavated soil along the banks, creating a gradual slope toward the edges of the container. This mimics the convex floodplain of the Nile.
5. Line the trench with aluminum foil or plastic wrap, and cover the lining with pebbles.
6. Plant grass seeds in the potting soil, covering the entire area.
7. Pour water into the excavated trench at the elevated end.
8. Experiment with the speed and amount of water that you pour into the river. You should be pouring enough water for your river to flood the entire container.
9. If the soil dries out in a day or two, be sure to flood the Nile again!

**Questions:**

1. How much water did it take to make the Nile flood?
2. How did the water behave once it breached the banks of the river?
3. How long did it take for your grass seeds to sprout?
4. How many times did you have to flood the river to keep the soil moist?
5. What does this experiment tell you about the amount of water brought by the Nile each season?

## TIMELINE “PUZZLE”

The history of ancient Egyptian civilization spans several millennia. However, much of this history remained unknown to the modern world until the discovery of the Rosetta Stone in 1799. This trilingual text allowed archaeologists to decipher Egyptian hieroglyphs, which opened the doors to discovering the long and rich history of Egyptian civilization. We can now track the development over time of Egypt’s governments, rulers, borders, writing systems, religions, and art styles.

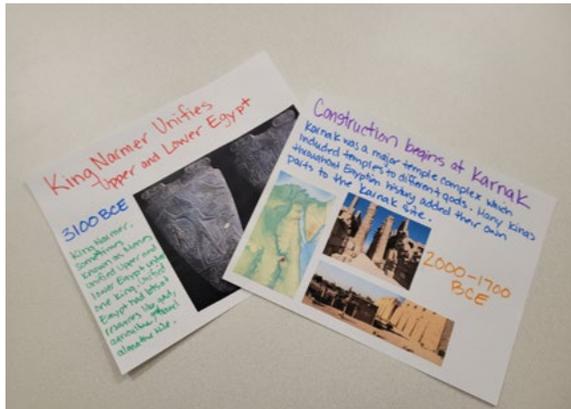
Archaeologists deciphered and pieced together the story of ancient Egypt through different pieces of evidence, and now you can too! In this activity, you will create a timeline of major events in ancient Egyptian history, starting with the earliest known settlers and ending with the annexation of Egypt by Rome.

1. With your assigned historical event or person, use a piece of paper to create one piece of the “puzzle” of ancient Egyptian history. Include the following:
  - A. Name of the event/person
  - B. The date
  - C. An illustration
  - D. Write 1 to 2 sentences explaining the importance of that event.
2. When you have completed your puzzle piece, work together with your classmates to put together the “puzzle” of ancient Egyptian history.

Each student should be assigned one of the events (or historical periods) listed below. A broad selection of events representative of the different periods should be chosen. This way, students can begin to see changes in Egyptian civilization and make connections about this history across time.

### Materials:

- Pre-made: paper puzzle pieces that fit together into one long row (one puzzle piece for each event)
- Something to draw with (colored pencils, markers, crayons, etc.)
- Tape (to connect the puzzle pieces together)
- A surface large enough to assemble the puzzle pieces (a wall or whiteboard works best)



**Historical Periods:**

4000–3100 BCE	Predynastic Period
3100–2750 BCE	Early Dynastic Period
2750–2260 BCE	Old Kingdom
2040–1650 BCE	Middle Kingdom
1570–1070 BCE	New Kingdom
664–332 BCE	Late Period
332–30 BCE	Ptolemaic Period

**Events:**

6000 BCE	People first settle the Nile River Valley in sedentary villages, domesticating crops and using irrigation.
3100 BCE	King Narmer (Menes) becomes the first king of Egypt, uniting Upper and Lower Egypt and founding Egypt's first capital at Memphis.
3100 BCE	First hieroglyphs.
3000 BCE	First appearance of standardized Egyptian art style, which endured for 3,000 years.
2630 BCE	First stone pyramid built at Saqqara for King Djoser.
2600 BCE	The Great Pyramid built at Giza.
2570 BCE	The Pyramid of Khafre built at Giza.
2510 BCE	The Pyramid of Menkaure built at Giza.
2500 BCE	Great Sphinx built at Giza for King Khafre.
2200 BCE	The 6th Dynasty collapses. Upper and Lower Egypt split.
2055 BCE	Mentuhotep II gains control of the entire kingdom, reuniting Upper and Lower Egypt.
2000–1710 BCE	Earliest part of the Temple of Karnak built.
1710 BCE	Hyksos rulers take control of the delta region, introducing new technologies such as the chariot.
1550 BCE	Ahmosé overthrows the Hyksos and becomes king, reuniting Upper and Lower Egypt
1473 BCE	Hatshepsut becomes king.
1352 BCE	Akhenaten becomes king and changes Egypt's religion to monotheistic worship of Aten, the sun god.
1336 BCE	Tutankhamun becomes king. Traditional, polytheistic religion returns to Egypt.
1279 BCE	Rameses II becomes king.
1077 BCE	Upper and Lower Egypt split.
782 BCE	King Piye of Nubia conquers Egypt.
669 BCE	Assyrians from Mesopotamia conquer and rule Egypt.
525 BCE	Persians conquer and rule Egypt.
332 BCE	Alexander the Great conquers Egypt and founds Alexandria.
30 BCE	Cleopatra dies. Egypt becomes a province of the Roman Empire.

## SELF-PORTRAIT USING EGYPTIAN CANON

Beginning in the Old Kingdom we see the canon of Egyptian art taking shape. A canon is a set of rules that artists follow to create their sculptures, figurines, and so on. By the Middle Kingdom we see a set canon in the production of human figures in ancient Egypt. Human figures were plotted against a grid background to help artists attain the perfect measurements between certain body parts, and therefore perfect consistency and representation.

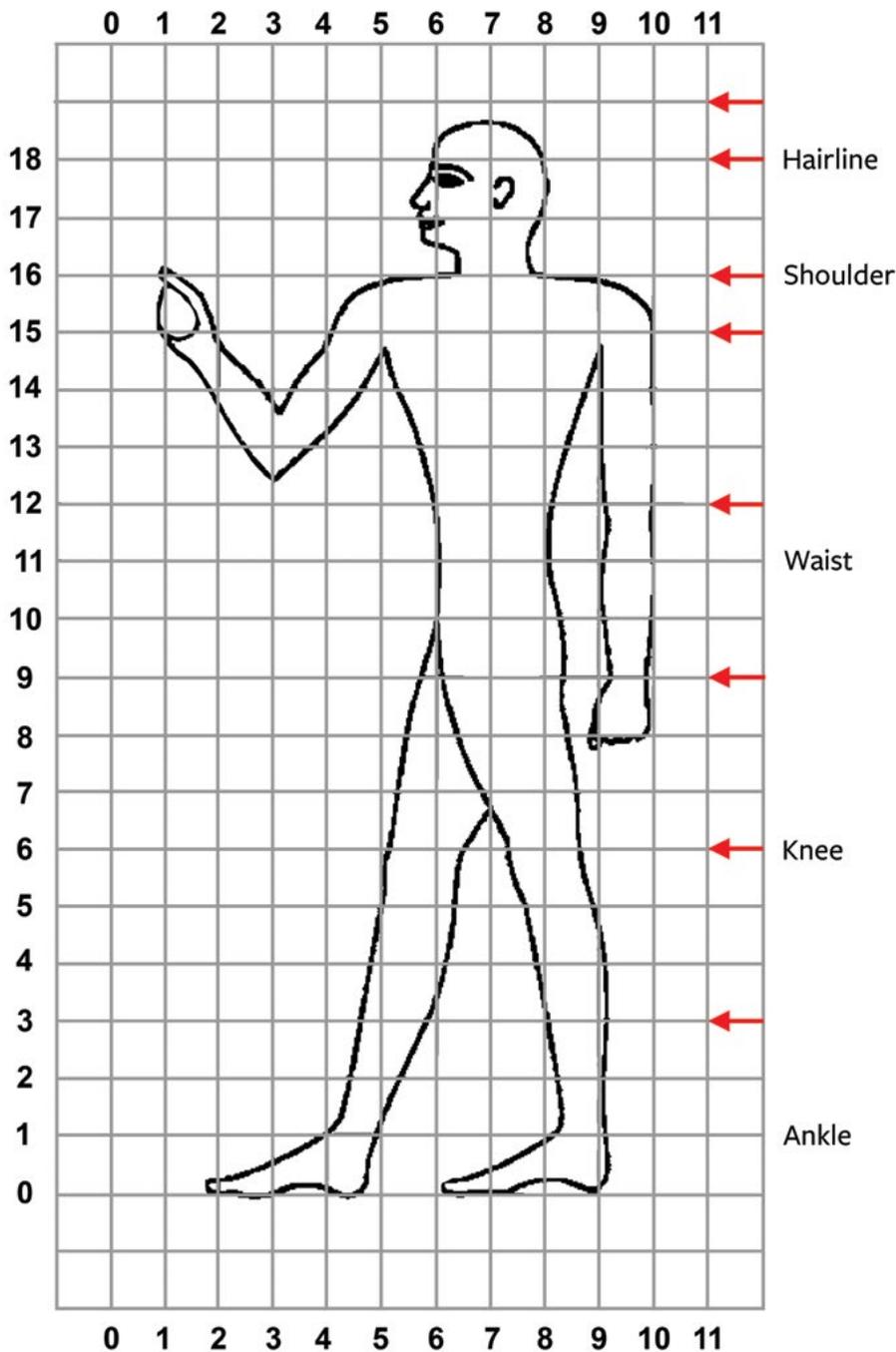
The grid system that the Egyptians used varied from 18 to 20 squares tall from the Middle to the New Kingdom, but the size of the squares stayed roughly the same. In this activity, we use the Middle Kingdom system of 18 squares.

### **Materials:**

- Graph paper (wide rule)
- Pencils
- Colored pencils, crayons, or markers

### **Instructions:**

Using the image and rules on the following page as a guide, create your own self-portrait. Make sure to follow all the rules for body part positions as well as size.



- The line between the nose and lip is 1 line below the hairline.
- The nipples are placed 4 lines below the hairline.
- Shoulders are the widest part of the body, 5 lines across for both men and women.
- The distance between armpits is 4 lines for men and 3 for women.
- The elbow is  $\frac{1}{3}$  the distance from the hairline to the soles of the feet.
- For men, the small of the back is 7 lines from the hairline and 2–2.5 lines wide.
- For women, the small of the back is 8 lines from the hairline and is 2 lines wide.
- The lower line of the buttocks is the midway point between the hairline and the soles of the feet.
- The knee is  $\frac{2}{3}$  the distance from the hairline to the soles of the feet.
- One vertical line running through the ear divides the figure into two.

**For body position:**

- Head in profile
- Eye is frontal
- Chest and shoulders are frontal
- Legs and feet are in profile
- One arm is straight down and the other is raised, bent at the elbow.

## NILE VALLEY INTERDEPENDENCE WEB

The Nile River Valley was first settled around 6000 BCE. The inhabitants were drawn to the region because of its central water source, which could be used for food production, transportation, and protection. With the development of agricultural techniques such as irrigation, the early small settlements grew into permanent towns and villages. Urban growth brought new divisions of labor and economic specialization in different jobs. As a result, an interdependent society with newly formed social structures emerged, where individuals relied on one another for survival.

In this activity, you will examine five different aspects of ancient Egyptian society and create an interdependence web based on your findings. As you examine each aspect, you should think about its importance to the development of the civilization as a whole. How did this particular part of society impact the way in which the Egyptian people lived their lives?

### **5 Stations:**

1. Farming/Agriculture
2. The River
3. Housing
4. Clothing
5. Specialized Jobs

### **FARMING/AGRICULTURE**

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#### **Main crops:**

Wheat, Barley, Flax

Wheat was ground into flour and used to make bread and beer

#### **Main animals:**

Cattle, Pigs, Goats, Sheep, Poultry (Geese/Ducks)

#### **Three major seasons in the agricultural year:**

- **Flood (Akhet or “Inundation”; June–September/October):** Torrential rain in the highlands south of Egypt between May and August caused the Nile to breach its banks, leaving fields in the region completely covered in water. During the flood season, farmers prepared tools, fished, and tended to livestock. In this early period of Egyptian civilization, all tools were made of wood, even plows, shovels, hoes, and harvesting sickles.
- **Growing (Peret or “Growth”; October–February):** Immediately after the flood waters receded, farmers planted their crops using hand tools or, if they were wealthy enough to own one, an ox-pulled wooden plow. Livestock were then run over the fields to fully cover the seed, and canals were dug to bring water from the river into the fields. During this season, farmers also protected their fields from other animals, such as birds, who might eat their crops.

- Harvest (Shemu or “Harvest”; February–June): This was the dry season, immediately preceding the flood season. Crops were cut down, bundled, and brought home. To release the individual grains from the plant stalks (called threshing), farmers either used hand tools to beat the plants, or let their animals walk through the fields. The harvested grain was then winnowed by tossing it in the air so that the light, inedible chaff blew away. The edible grain was then collected and stored in a safe container such as an amphora. This whole process took a considerable amount of time and concluded shortly before the planting of the next year’s crop.

**Using this information, answer the following questions:**

1. What were the main crops grown in the Nile River Valley?
2. What materials were tools made out of? How were they made?
3. How many seasons were in the farmer’s year? What activities did farmers complete in each season?

## THE RIVER

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- The Nile is more than 4,000 miles long, flowing north from its sources in the southern highlands to its termination in the Mediterranean Sea.
- Seasonal flooding of the ancient Egyptian Nile River Valley was caused by rainfall in the mountains.
- This flooding was integral to ancient Egyptian agriculture as it brought fresh soil, nutrients, and water into agricultural fields along the riverbank.
- The river was also an important part of ancient Egyptian religious practices. Egyptians believed that gods and goddesses controlled the river, bringing about different seasons. Egyptians worshiped these gods and goddesses, particularly Hathor and later Isis and Osiris, as a way to ensure that water would return each year to replenish their farms.
- Ancient Egyptians also used the river as a means of transportation, including the transportation of goods.
- The river was home to many animals, making it a hunting ground for humans and animals alike. Fish and waterfowl in particular were a good source of food during the flood season.

**Using this information, answer the following questions:**

4. What direction does the Nile flow? How long is it?
5. Why does the river flood every year?
6. How did this flooding benefit ancient Egyptian society?
7. In what ways was the Nile important to ancient Egyptian society?

## HOUSING

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Egyptian houses were constructed primarily of mudbrick, with wood used only for doors, windows, and roof beams. Each house had a small living area, a place to cook, and often a second story that was used for sleeping. If there was no second story, people slept on the roof.

When you think of ancient Egyptian architecture, you probably think of the pyramids first. However, pyramids are tombs, not homes. The houses people lived in were usually small, simple buildings made from inexpensive and readily available materials. Living on the bank of a river, the most accessible material was mud. Egyptians made bricks by forming a mixture of river mud and straw and shaping it into blocks. The blocks were left to dry in the sun for several days until they hardened. The completed bricks could then be stacked into walls. Wood was used as structural support for the roof, which was made of bundled reeds covered in mud. The walls were then coated with plaster, both to protect the bricks and to make the house appear cleaner. Most ancient Egyptian homes had very few windows. Houses were intended to provide protection from the sand and the beating sun; windows would let in both the sand and the sun. In larger towns, some people lived in one room within a larger building, much like an apartment building.

**Using this information, answer the following questions:**

1. What was the main building material of ancient Egyptian houses? Of their roofs?
2. Why were these materials chosen?
3. How big was the average house?
4. What was the typical living situation of the average worker? Why?

## CLOTHING

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Today we can look at the tags on our clothes and see both where they were made and what they were made of, and the variety of answers is quite large. However, in ancient Egypt, the answer would be fairly simple: most clothing was made at home using linen or wool.

Making clothing was a job predominantly done by women. Most clothing was made from a common plant of the region called flax, which produces a cloth called linen. First, green flax plants were harvested from the banks of the Nile, where they grew in abundance. The stems were soaked in water to soften them, then beaten into fibers. Then, using a hand spindle, the fibers were spun into thread that could be woven into linen fabric using a loom. In addition to being sourced from abundant local resources, linen was also highly valued for its practicality. It is a very breathable fabric and its white coloring reflects the sun, both of which are important factors for individuals living in the desert.

Due to the difficult and time-consuming process needed to make them, clothes were used as long as possible and were relatively uniform. Basic clothing was the same for everyone: a loosely draped white fabric that wrapped around the body. Due to the desire to preserve clothing, laborers often worked in only a loincloth to keep their everyday clothing in good condition. In addition, because everyone wore the same basic clothing, jewelry and accessories were incredibly important to ancient Egyptian style and dress.

**Using this information, answer the following questions:**

1. What material was clothing made from?
2. Where does this fiber come from? How is it made into fabric?
3. What color did everyone wear? Why?
4. Where did people get their clothing?

## **SPECIALIZED JOBS**

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Ancient Egyptian society relied on a division of labor, meaning that people in each village had specific jobs. Because they had specialized jobs, everyone had to work together and rely on each other for survival. Below are some of the jobs individuals had in ancient Egypt. Match each job description to the individual who performed that task.

**Architect**

**Basket Maker**

**Carpenter**

**Doctor**

**Entertainer**

**Mason**

**Merchant**

**Metalsmith**

**Priest**

**Potter**

**Sandal Maker**

**Scribe**

**Soldier**

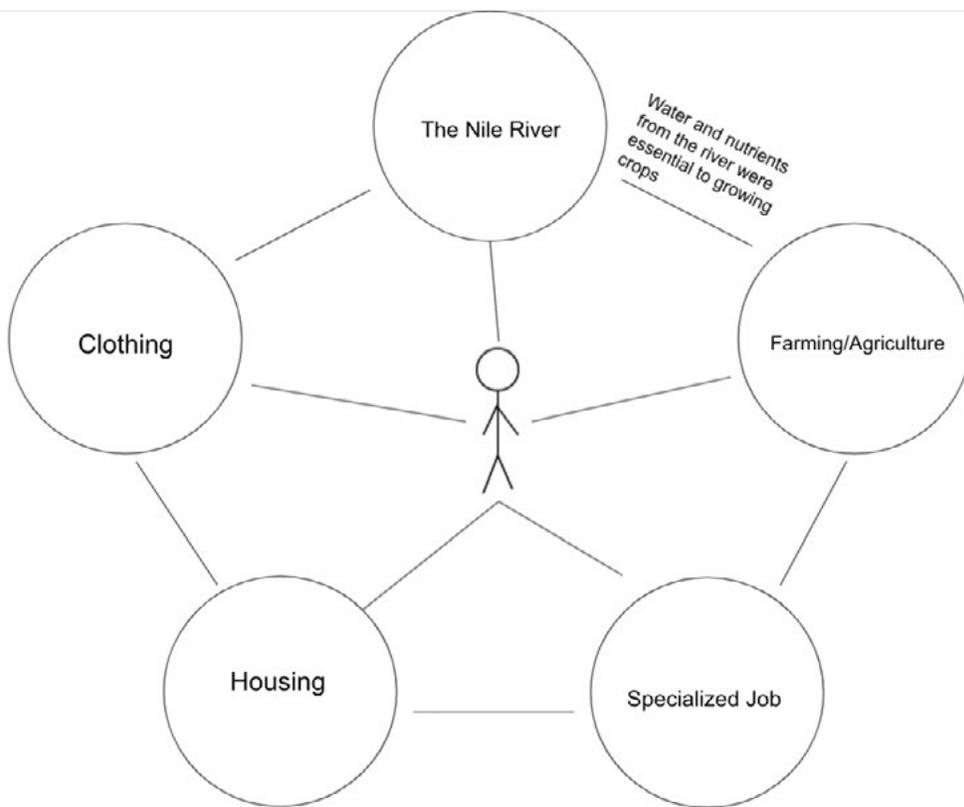
**Stone Mason**

**Vizier**

- Built and fixed mudbrick houses
- Traded goods, food, tools, and clothing, often traveling up and down the Nile
- Built tools, coffins, boats, and furniture from wood
- Practiced and led religious rituals, advising leaders

- Created clay jars for storage of goods
- Made sandals from woven reeds
- Wrote and kept records for officials, either on papyrus or carved in stone
- Melted and molded gold, silver, and bronze for tools or jewelry
- Wove baskets from reeds to store goods
- Protected the town and kingdom from invaders or animals
- Healed physical wounds, treated sickness
- Carved stone for buildings
- Advised the king, supervised the running of the kingdom, and laid down the code of behavior
- Designed and oversaw large building projects, usually commissioned by the king
- Professional dancers, jugglers, and acrobats hired by nobility to amuse guests

Create an interdependence web using the information you have gathered from the different stations. How are each aspect of the Nile River Valley civilization reliant on each other? How would the average person living in this society rely on each aspect?



## DAILY NEWS SHOW

The modern news industry is a mass-media enterprise that focuses on delivering information about current events to the general public or a targeted audience. Whether one reads it in newspapers, hears it on the radio, or watches it on television, news is a common aspect of modern daily life. However, the news of today is a relatively recent development. The first printed news, in the form of pamphlets, appeared in the 1400s, in Germany. The first regularly scheduled television news broadcast aired in 1940. Now, you might ask: How did people learn about current events before newspapers and television? In ancient Egypt, royals and elites received information through letters delivered through a courier system.

There were no newspapers in ancient Egypt, let alone news broadcasts, but try to imagine what ancient Egyptian news might have looked like. In this activity, you will create your own 2- to 3-minute news clip that reports an event of ancient Egyptian society. This event can be one you have studied, or you can come up with one on your own. Either way, be creative!

**In your broadcast, make sure to include the following:**

- The facts about the event (What happened? When? Who/What was involved?)
  - Context or circumstances surrounding the event
  - Impact (What were the consequences? Who was affected?)
  - A headline for your story
  - The name of your news broadcasting company
- Examples: “Sea Peoples Invade: Egyptian Shores Threatened”; “Hyksos Take Over Lower Egypt”; “New King!”

For a fun option, record the broadcast to share with friends and family at home.

## FRUIT MUMMIFICATION

Mummies are one of the most fascinating things about ancient Egypt. The process of mummification was an important part of Egyptian belief in the afterlife. It developed over many centuries as the ancient Egyptians slowly determined the best methods of preservation.

Before wrapping the body in linens, Egyptians dried out the body of the deceased using a disinfectant and drying agent called natron, a compound of sodium carbonate and sodium bicarbonate (salt and baking soda). In this activity, you will make your own natron and use it to see how long it takes to desiccate (dry out) a piece of fruit.

### **You will need:**

- 3 containers (glass jars, Ziploc bags, or cups are fine)
- Measuring cups and spoons
- 1 medium bowl
- Roll of gauze
- Fruit – 3 pieces of the same size (a vegetable will also work)
- Baking soda
- Salt

### **Procedure:**

1. Make the natron: Combine 6 tablespoons of baking soda and 1 ½ tablespoons of salt in the bowl.
2. Place one piece of fruit in a container. Add half of the natron mixture, making sure the piece is completely covered. Seal the container and label it.
3. Wrap the second piece of fruit in gauze and place in a container. Cover with remaining natron mixture. Seal the container and label it.
4. Take the third piece of fruit and wrap in gauze. Place the fruit in the third container, seal, and label it.
5. Place all three containers in a cool, dark, dry place for at least 1 week. This can be an ongoing project throughout your Egypt section and beyond. You can “mummify” your fruit for 2 to 3 months, checking how each piece is doing.
6. Check your fruit after 1 week and after 2 weeks. Sketch your results.

### **Questions to ask at the beginning of the experiment:**

1. Which piece of fruit do you think will be the best preserved? Why?
2. What will each piece of fruit look like? Feel like?

### **Questions for the conclusion of the experiment:**

1. Describe what each piece of fruit looks and feels like.
2. Which piece of fruit was the best preserved?



## DAY IN THE LIFE ESSAY

With the shift to a market economy during the agricultural revolution, ancient Egypt began to see more variety in the distribution of labor. More people specialized in the growing of specific types of crops, and new administrative positions were created to oversee this production. These changes arose alongside the creation of social classes, hierarchies, and an uneven distribution of wealth. As a result of these changes, ancient Egyptian society became more complex. Administrators and local governments became necessary to organize the new parts of society, and regional and national governments gradually developed. To understand daily life, it is necessary to first understand how people in that society relate to one another under the established social systems.

The goal of this activity is to gain a better understanding of one ancient Egyptian profession and the role it played in society. From the list below, choose one profession and write a 2- to 3-page essay detailing a “day in the life” of that profession. Consider all aspects of the daily routine. What tasks would this person have to complete every day? What other individuals would they interact with? What challenges might they have faced?

### **Jobs:**

- King
- Vizier
- Priest
- Administrator (tax collector, provincial administrator, overseer, etc.)
- Scribe
- Merchant
- Skilled Laborer/Artisan (carpenter, basket weaver, jeweler, etc.)
- Military/Soldier
- Farmer
- Servant

# MAKE YOUR OWN CLAY CARTOUCHE

Ancient Egyptians inscribed the names of kings and gods in an oval frame called a cartouche. This frame represented a looped rope that had the power to protect the name written inside it. Cartouches were often worn by royal individuals to protect their spirits from evil, both in life and in death.

Cartouches were typically vertical with a horizontal line at the bottom, but they could be arranged horizontally if it matched the structure of surrounding text.

In this activity, use the chart below to convert the sounds of your name into the corresponding Egyptian hieroglyphs. Then follow the instructions to create your own wearable cartouche.

	A	vulture		L	lion		W	chick
	B	leg		M	owl		X	cloth
	C	cup		N	water		Y	feathers
	D	hand		O	chick		Z	bolt
	E	feather		P	stool		CH	tether
	F	viper		Q	hill		KH	sieve
	G	pot		R	mouth		SH	basin
	H	wick		S	cloth		MAN	
	I	feather		T	loaf		WOMAN	
	J	cobra		U	chick		ANKH	
	K	cup		V	viper			

## WRITING YOUR NAME IN HIEROGLYPHS

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### Materials:

- Air-dry or polymer clay. You can also make your own salt dough (see recipe below)
- Yarn or string
- Pen, pencil, or toothpick (something pointed that can be used to carve into the clay)

**Instructions:**

1. Using the chart on the opposite side of this sheet, determine how your name is spelled in hieroglyphs. Write it down on paper.
2. Select a golf ball-sized piece of clay and roll it into a cylinder. (The length of the cartouche will depend on the amount of clay. Longer names may need more clay, and shorter names may need less clay.)
3. Using your fingers, lightly flatten the clay into an oval.
4. Flip the clay over so the smooth surface faces up.
5. Using your carving tool, make a hole at the top of the oval that is large enough for your string to fit through.
6. Carve the hieroglyph version of your name into the clay.
7. Allow to dry for 24 hours, or follow the drying instructions included with store-bought clay.
8. Once dry, thread a length of string or yarn through the hole at the top and tie a double knot.
9. Your cartouche is ready to wear!

**RECIPE FOR SALT DOUGH**

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**Ingredients:**

- 2 cups flour
- 1 cup salt
- 1 cup water

**Instructions:**

Note: You can use a stand mixer with the dough hook attachment, or mix by hand.

1. Whisk together flour and salt.
2. Slowly add water while mixing.
3. Continue mixing until well combined.
4. If the mixture is too runny, add flour gradually until it reaches Play-Doh consistency.  
If too dry, add a small amount of water.
5. Knead for 3 to 5 minutes until the dough holds its shape.
6. Option: Add food coloring of your choice.
7. Use dough as instructed above.

## MAKE YOUR OWN “PAPYRUS” PAPER

### **Materials:**

- Paper bags
- All-purpose glue
- Water
- Paper towels
- Bowl, large
- Newspapers

### **Instructions:**

1. Cover your work surface with newspaper.
2. Cut or tear paper bags into long strips.
3. In bowls, mix equal parts glue and water.
4. Lay out a paper towel.
5. Dip strips of paper bags into the glue mixture one at a time, completely covering the pieces.
6. Lay out the pieces on top of the paper towel lengthwise, ensuring that the edges overlap.
7. Press out any extra glue.
8. While your first layer is still wet, add a second layer of strips, placing these crosswise on top of the bottom layer. Make sure the edges overlap.
9. Press out any extra glue, smoothing your sheet of paper.
10. Let the sheet air dry.
11. Decorate your papyrus! Try your hand at some scenes from the Book of the Dead, or maybe some hieroglyphs and images of the Egyptian gods.

## CLASSROOM MUSEUM EXHIBIT

Archaeologists are dedicated to reconstructing the past using the material remains left behind by human activity. This means they study previously unearthed artifacts, as well as seeking previously undiscovered artifacts that might reveal information about how ancient people lived. What do archaeologists do with these artifacts when they are not actively studying them? How do they share what they have found with the public?

One way artifacts and their stories are shared with the public is through museums. Museum curators choose a variety of artifacts to put on display in an exhibit to help visitors engage with and learn about the history and culture connected to the artifacts. In this activity, students take on the role of a curator to create their own “Classroom Exhibit” on Ancient Egypt.

### **Part 1: Deciding on the “Big Idea”**

Before artifacts are chosen, an exhibit must have a guiding theme or central idea. Discuss as a class what you think are the most important and interesting concepts from your lessons on ancient Egypt. Once you settle on the “Big Idea” behind the exhibit, students can start choosing objects and creating their own displays.

### **Part 2: Creating the Display**

Each student should choose one artifact to research. Using the medium of their choice, have each student create a display to present the artifact to the rest of the class. The display should include the following information:

- The name of the artifact
- An image of the artifact
- Basic information about the artifact
- Origin/where it was found
- Size/measurements
- A label including the following information:
  - A. The importance of the artifact to the theme of the exhibit
  - B. The artifact’s original purpose
  - C. Any other interesting facts about the artifact

### **Part 3: The Exhibit**

One of the most important parts of an exhibit is how it is experienced by a visitor and how the visitor engages with the objects on display. As you walk through the exhibit, write down three questions you have about other artifacts in the exhibit.

# MAP OF EGYPT



# CHRONOLOGY OF ANCIENT EGYPT

The history of ancient Egypt is divided into 30 dynasties (31 by some chronologies). The individual dynasties are grouped into three kingdoms, which are separated by intermediate periods. The Dynastic Period was preceded by a long Predynastic Period. In many cases, the divisions between dynasties are arbitrary. All dates prior to 664 BCE are approximate.

## **Predynastic Period | 4800–3100 BCE**

- Naqada I, 4000–3500 BCE
- Naqada II, 3500–3200 BCE

## **Early Dynastic Period (Dynasties 0–2) | 3100–2750 BCE**

- Dynasty 0, 3100–3000. Unification of Upper and Lower Egypt. First hieroglyphs.
- Dynasties 1–2, 3000–2750. Consolidation of the Egyptian state.

## **Old Kingdom (Dynasties 3–6) | 2750–2260 BCE**

- Dynasty 3. First large-scale stone funerary monuments for kings and nobility.
- Dynasty 4. Construction of pyramids in Lower Egypt.
- Dynasty 5. Elaboration of private tombs.
- Dynasty 6. Height of Old Kingdom tomb decoration.

## **First Intermediate Period (Dynasties 7–11) | 2260–2040 BCE**

- Dynasties 7–8. Many ephemeral rulers.
- Dynasties 9–11. Fragmentation of the state. Rise of local power centers.

## **Middle Kingdom (Dynasties 11–13) | 2040–1650 BCE**

- Dynasty 11. Upper and Lower Egypt reunified.
- Dynasty 12. Rise of the god Amun in Thebes. Emergence of state deity Amun-Re.
- Dynasty 13. Decentralization and several short-lived ruling families.

## **Second Intermediate Period (Dynasties 14–17) | 1650–1570 BCE**

- Incursion of the Hyksos from western Asia into Lower Egypt.

## **New Kingdom (Dynasties 18–20) | 1570–1070 BCE**

- Dynasty 18. Construction of a great many temples at Thebes. Establishment of royal tombs in the Valley of the Kings and Valley of the Queens. Brief period of monotheism under Akhenaten.
- Dynasty 19. Expansion of Karnak and Luxor temples. Construction of the Ramesseum.
- Dynasty 20. Last use of Valley of the Kings as a royal cemetery. Incursions of “Sea Peoples” in eastern Mediterranean.

## **Third Intermediate Period (Dynasties 21–25) | 1070–664 BCE**

- Dynasties 21–24. Period of political decentralization.
- Dynasty 25. Upper and Lower Egypt ruled by Nubian kings. Period of fine coffins, elaborate mummification procedures, mythological papyri, and the rise of animal cults.

**Late Period (Dynasties 26–30) | 664–332 BCE**

- Dynasty 26. Saite Period. Renaissance in arts and building. Construction of large private tombs at Thebes.
- Dynasties 27–30. Native Egyptian rule interrupted by two Persian dominations.

**Ptolemaic Period (Hellenistic Period) | 332–30 BCE**

- Alexander the Great's conquest of Egypt (332–323) marks the beginning of the Hellenistic Period. Following the death of Alexander in 323, Egypt was bequeathed to his general Ptolemy. Continuation of most religious traditions.

**Roman Period | 30 BCE–395 CE**

- With Octavian's defeat of Antony and Cleopatra, Egypt was annexed to the Roman Empire, ending the Hellenistic Period.

**Byzantine Period | 395–641 CE**

## EXAMPLES OF NAQADA I AND II POTTERY



Painted bowl. Naqada I Period.



Painted jar and pot. Naqada II Period.



# LIST OF ARTIFACTS AND IMAGES

## THE GEOGRAPHY OF EGYPT

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- Map of Egypt showing key sites and features. © Lorene Sterner / Kelsey Museum.
- The rich agricultural land of the Nile Valley. Photo: Jeremy Bezanger.
- The road through the Eastern Mountains from Qift to Quseir. Wadi Hammamat, Egypt. Photo: Su Bayfield.

## THE HISTORY OF ANCIENT EGYPT

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- Mortuary Temple of Hatshepsut, Deir el-Bahri, Egypt. Dynasty 18. Photo: Jeremy Bezanger
- Pottery from Predynastic Upper Egypt:
  - Bowl with painted designs. Naqada I Period. Farshut, Egypt. P. Tano purchase. KM 88813.
  - Jar. Late Naqada II Period. Metropolitan Museum of Art 20.2.10. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
  - Pot with lug handles. Naqada II Period. Farshut, Egypt. P. Tano purchase. KM 88814.
- Faience objects:
  - *Ushabti*, Late Period. D. Askren purchase. KM 88721.
  - *Wedjat*, Late–Ptolemaic Periods. Bay View collection. KM 1971.2.29.
  - Broad collar necklace, Late Period–Ptolemaic Period. E. Goudsmit gift. KM 2001.1.2.
- Narmer Palette. Dynasty 0. Nekhen, Egypt. Egyptian Museum, Cairo, CG14716.
- Objects from Early Dynastic tomb: these and other objects were found in Tomb 103 at Gurob. Early Dynastic Period. Petrie excavations at Gurob, Egypt. Gift of W.M.F. Petrie, 1921. KM 1899, 1904, 1900, 1901. Tomb plan after G. Brunton and R. Engelbach, *Gurob* (London: British School of Archaeology in Egypt, 1927).
- False door panel of Qar. Painted limestone. Dynasty 6. Saqqara, Egypt. S. Goudsmit gift. KM 1981.4.1.
- Temple of Amun at Karnak. Photo by George Swain, 1920. Kelsey Museum neg. KS140.08.
- Cuneiform letter from Yapahu of Gazru to the king of Egypt. British Museum, E50745. © Trustees of the British Museum.
- Defaced image of Hatshepsut at the Mortuary Temple of Hatshepsut, Deir el-Bahari. Photo by Easton Kelsey, 1920. Kelsey Museum neg. KK029.
- Fragmentary stela showing Akhenaten. Painted limestone. Dynasty 18. Amarna, Egypt. British Museum, EA24431. © Trustees of the British Museum.
- Replica of the funerary mask of Tutankhamun (original: Egyptian Museum, Cairo, JE 60672). Photo: Carsten Frenzl.
- Head of Rameses II from a colossal statue. Ramesseum at Thebes, Egypt. Photo by George Swain, 1920. Kelsey Museum neg. KS140.17.
- “Ramesses III and His Fleet in Battle with the Fleet of the Sea Peoples.” Plate 37 from *Medinet Habu I: Earlier Historical Records of Ramses III*, by the Epigraphic Survey. Oriental Institute Publications 8 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930).
- Rendering of a Nubian pyramid. Pyramid Ku. 1 at El-Kurru, Sudan. © Nadejda Reshetnikova / International Kurru Archaeological Project, 2019.

- Marble bust of Augustus. Early Roman Period. Cummer Fund purchase. KM 1975.1.1.
- Silver coin (stater) of Ptolemy I, 294–282 BCE. Ptolemaic Period. KM 81263.
- Egyptian funerary stela with Greek inscription. Roman Period. U-M excavations at Terenouthis, Egypt. KM 21179.

## GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL STRUCTURES

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- Depiction of a trading expedition on the walls of the Mortuary Temple of Hatshepsut, Deir el-Bahari. Dynasty 18. Photo: kairoinfo4u.
- Remains of a granary at Karanis. Photo by George Swain, ca. 1930. Kelsey Museum neg. 5.3831.
- Canal near Karanis. A view up the Abdallah Wahabi canal, showing one of the dams. Photo by George Swain, ca. 1930. Kelsey Museum neg. 78.
- Stela showing a man making offerings to three gods. Round-topped limestone stela, from the tomb of Horemheb at Saqqara. Dynasty 18. British Museum, EA551. © Trustees of the British Museum.
- Limestone stela showing a priest making offerings. Dynasties 27–30. Egypt. Bay View collection. KM 1971.2.189.
- Papyrus tax register from Karanis, Egypt. Roman Period, 172–173 CE. U-M excavations at Karanis, Egypt. University of Michigan Papyrology Collection, P.Mich.inv. 4171.
- Farm tools.
  - Iron drag-hoe. Roman Period, 1st century CE. Michigan State Millers' Association gift. KM 1949.
  - Metal shears. Roman Period. U-M excavations at Karanis, Egypt. KM 3638.
  - Miniature wooden hammer. Roman Period. U-M excavations at Karanis, Egypt. KM 3774.

## DAILY LIFE IN ANCIENT EGYPT

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- Wall-painting of a man plowing a field, from the burial chamber of Sennedjem at Deir el-Medina. New Kingdom. Photo: Zenodot Verlagsgesellschaft.
- Clay offering tray depicting a two-story house within an enclosure. Dynasty 12. British Museum, EA32610. © Trustees of the British Museum.
- Schematic of a multi-story house at Karanis. Kelsey Museum Archives, 5.5498.
- Amphorae as found in the storeroom of a house at Karanis. Roman Period. Kelsey Museum neg. 5.1802.
- Household objects and preserved food from Karanis. Roman Period. Cooking pot, KM 7796; peach pits, KM 3919; dates, KM 23190; lupine seeds, KM 3699; murex shell, KM 3712, olive pressings, KM 4797; fish hook, KM 21409; nutshells, KM 3874; wheat ears, KM 3952.
- Painted wooden models of bakers and beer brewers, from the tomb of Meketre at Deir el-Bahari. Middle Kingdom. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 20.3.12. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- Stoppered glass decanter with two stemmed glasses. Roman Period. U-M excavations at Karanis, Egypt. KM 5936 (decanter), 5965, and 5966 (glasses).
- Objects of daily life. Wooden hook and palm fiber rope, KM 8233; palm fiber sandal, KM 8470; palm fiber whisk broom, KM 3508. U-M excavations at Karanis, Egypt. Roman Period.
- Locking technology from Karanis. Wooden door with lock, KM 8151; wooden storage box with bronze lock plate, 24932; two lock cases, KM 3342, 3516; wooden key with “key chain,” KM 3349. U-M excavations at Karanis, Egypt. Roman Period.
- Objects of entertainment. On black field, from upper left: wooden clapper, KM 3532; clay figurine of a musician playing a hand-drum, KM 6588; wooden flute, KM 26997; bronze bell, KM 10735.

Lower left: conical glass dice cup with bone dice, KM 5930 (cup) and KM 22782–85. Clay figurine a gift of P. Ruthven, 1935. All others from U-M excavations at Karanis. Roman Period.

- Objects of childhood. Left: clay statuette of Bes, KM 1971.2.208. Right, clockwise from upper left: woolen rag doll, KM 3543; clay animal figurine, 26397; string of faience Bes amulets, KM 24079; wooden wheeled horse, KM 7692; wooden toy fish, KM 7525. Bes statuette from the Bay View collection. All others from U-M excavations at Karanis, Egypt. Roman Period.

## RELIGION AND THE PANTHEON

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- Detail from the Book of the Dead of Sesostris depicting the Weighing of the Heart ritual. Dynasty 18. Photo: Manfred Werner.
- Wall relief showing Amun receiving gifts from King Horemheb, from the Tenth Pylon of the Temple of Amun-Re at Karnak. Dynasty 18. Photo: Rémi.
- Bronze bust of falcon-headed Re with solar disk. Late Period. Kom Afrin, Egypt. British Museum, EA16037. © Trustees of the British Museum.
- Top of a limestone stela depicting a man offering to Amun-Re in ram form. Ptolemaic Period. Naucratis, Egypt. W. Spiegelberg purchase. KM 25803.
- Anubis as embalmer, from the painted wooden coffin of Djehutymose. Late Period. Albert M. Todd bequest. KM 1989.3.1.
- Limestone stela from Amarna showing Akhenaten, his wife Nefertiti, and their daughters sitting under the rays of the Aten. Dynasty 18. Ägyptisches Museum, Berlin, 14145. Photo: Neoclassicism Enthusiast.
- Bronze figure of Bastet. Late Period. Bubastis, Egypt. British Museum, EA25565. © Trustees of the British Museum.
- Clay figurine of Bes. Roman Period. Fayum region, Egypt. D. Askren collection. KM 4960.
- Clay figurine of Hathor. Roman Period. Fayum region, Egypt. D. Askren collection. KM 4961.
- Painted wood figurine of Horus. Dynasty 26. Cairo Department of Antiquities purchase. KM 88767.
- Clay figurine of Harpocrates riding a ram. Roman Period. Fayum region, Egypt. D. Askren collection. KM 3231.
- Isis depicted on the coffin of Djehutymose. Late Period. Albert M. Todd bequest. KM 1989.3.1.
- Imhotep on the coffin of Djehutymose. Late Period. Albert M. Todd bequest. KM 1989.3.1.
- Bronze figurine of Maat. Late Period. British Museum, EA60383. © Trustees of the British Museum.
- Bronze figurine of Mut. Ptolemaic Period. Gift of H. C. Hoskier. KM 4677.
- A scene depicting Nut as the heavenly canopy above the earth. Third Intermediate Period. Book of the Dead of Nestanebetisheru, frame 87. British Museum, EA10554,87. © Trustees of the British Museum.
- Grain mummy of Osiris in coffin. Third Intermediate Period–Late Period. P. Tano purchase. KM 88802.
- Idealized face of the deceased on the Djehutymose coffin. Late Period. Albert M. Todd bequest. KM 1989.3.1.
- Stone figurine of Ptah. Late Period, Dynasty 26. Egypt. Bay View collection. KM 1971.2.149.
- Detail of a painted wood stela depicting Re in the solar boat. Ptolemaic Period. Thebes, Egypt. British Museum, EA8464. © Trustees of the British Museum.
- Limestone stela depicting a man worshipping Set. Dynasty 19. Deirel-Medina, Egypt. British Museum, EA35630. © Trustees of the British Museum.

- Bronze figurine of Sobek. Ptolemaic Period–Late Period. British Museum, EA22924. © Trustees of the British Museum.
- Faience amulet of Tawaret. Ptolemaic Period. Bay View collection. KM 1971.2.71.
- Thoth depicted on the Djehutymose coffin. Dynasty 26. Albert M. Todd bequest. KM 1989.3.1.
- Bronze figurine of Serapis. Roman Period. U-M excavations at Karanis, Egypt. KM 10881.
- Painted wood figurine of Ptah-Sokar-Osiris. Dynasty 26. Nag el-Hassaia, Egypt. Department of Antiquities purchase. KM 88769.

## MORTUARY PRACTICES

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- Mummy from the Royal Ontario Museum.
- Limestone canopic jars. Late Period. Bay View collection. KM 1971.2.193.
- Detail of hieroglyphs inside the Djehutymose coffin. Dynasty 26. Albert M. Todd bequest. KM 1989.3.1.
- Faience *wedjat* amulet. Third Intermediate Period. Bay View collection. KM 1971.2.29.
- Stone heart scarab inscribed with a spell from the Book of the Dead. Third Intermediate Period. S.A. Goudsmit collection. KM 1981.4.77.
- Stone *djed* pillar amulet. New Kingdom–Late Period. Bay View collection. KM 1971.2.69.
- Gold *ankh* amulet. Roman Period. U-M excavations at Terenouthis, Egypt. KM 24221.
- Faience *ushabti*. Late Period. Bay View collection. KM 1971.2.162.
- The *ba* depicted as a human-headed falcon on the coffin of Djehutymose. Dynasty 26. Albert M. Todd bequest. KM 1989.3.1.
- Cat mummy. Roman Period. Bay View collection. KM 1971.2.183.
- Opening of the Mouth ceremony, from the Book of the Dead of Hunefer. Dynasty 19. British Museum, EA9901,5. © Trustees of the British Museum.
- Weighing of the Heart, from the Book of the Dead of Hunefer. Dynasty 19. British Museum, EA9901,5. © Trustees of the British Museum.
- Diagram of a mastaba tomb. After fig. 10.5 in *Egypt and the Egyptians*, by D.J. Brewer and E. Teeter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
- Step Pyramid of Djoser, Saqqara. Dynasty 3. Photo: Charles J. Sharp.
- A mastaba tomb at Saqqara. Dynasty 4. Photo: Jon Bodsworth.

## WRITING IN ANCIENT EGYPT

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- Hieroglyphic inscription from the Temple of Hathor at Dendera. Ptolemaic–Roman Periods. Photo: Jeremy Bezanger.
- Fragment of a limestone stela showing Osiris. Dynasty 18. Abydos or Thebes, Egypt. Bay View collection. KM 1971.2.191.
- False door panel of Qar, also known as Pepy-Nefer. Dynasty 6. Saqqara. S.A. Goudsmit collection. KM 1981.4.1.
- Hieratic writing on a fragment of the Book of the Dead. Late Period. S.A. Goudsmit collection. KM 1981.4.25.
- Clay ostrakon with demotic writing. Third Intermediate Period–Roman Period. David Askren collection. KM 4111.
- The Rosetta Stone. Ptolemaic Period. British Museum, EA24. © Trustees of the British Museum.
- Miniature papyrus book. Height: 8.5 cm. Roman Period. U-M excavations at Karanis, Egypt. KM 3815.

- Paint box containing writing implements and pigments. Roman Period. U-M excavations at Karanis, Egypt. KM 23929.
- Reed stylus. Roman Period. U-M excavations at Karanis, Egypt. KM 23922.

## ART IN ANCIENT EGYPT

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- Painted ceilings at the Theban Necropolis. Photo: Mo Gabrail.
- Detail from the false door of Qar. Dynasty 6. Saqqara. S.A. Goudsmit collection. KM 1981.4.1.
- Painted wood model of a butchering scene. Middle Kingdom. Cairo Department of Antiquities purchase, 1935. KM 88740 (butcher) and KM 88759 (ox).
- Limestone funerary stela with Greek inscription. Roman Period. Excavated from Terenouthis, Egypt. KM 21179.
- Wooden drawing board with red grid lines. British Museum, EA5601. © Trustees of the British Museum.