

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE INQUIRY

1. Which is greater: The impact of the environment on people or people on the environment?
2. How does where you live affect how you live?
3. How does what you eat affect how you live?
4. What does it mean to be civilized?

TERMS, PLACES, PEOPLE

fertile

pharaoh

Geography is rarely described as glamorous, yet, without geography of the area where Egyptian civilization developed, Egypt may not have become what it did. The **fertile** river valley along the Nile River allowed the Egyptian farmers to avoid famine. They could produce a surplus of food with a modest number of workers. They could use the remaining workforce to craft amazing feats of architecture. The Nile was also a provider of fish. There were many plants that grew in the riverbeds. These marshy lands were home to lots of mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and birds. The water for irrigating the fields carried mineral-rich silt that was scattered by the annual floods. This made the Nile the lifeline of the pharaoh's people.

Interactive 3.7 What did Ancient Egyptians Eat?

What did Ancient Egyptians eat and how do we know? [Click here for more!](#)

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The Nile River with its predictable floods and the surrounding desert: these were the geographic features which dominated Ancient Egypt. As you read about their historical development, always consider how the geography of the region might have impacted that development.

Early Technology: Harnessing the Nile River

Long before the rise of great civilizations in the Nile Valley, about 6000 BCE, irrigation began in Ancient Egypt. Irrigation gave life to the Egyptian Empire. Annually, as the flood season began every summer, ancient Egyptians sang a hymn to honor the river that gave them fertile land and nourishing food. They looked forward to these floods which they managed with great technology. Teamwork had to be in place for the Egyptians to control the flow of the water. They worked together to construct dikes which held back the water. The irrigation ditches that they dug diverted, or channeled, the rising waters. Collaboration was also the key as they created basins, also known as reservoirs, to hold great amounts of water to be used later during the dry season. The land left behind by the flood waters was fertile - good for producing crops. The river's current had picked up bits of black soil, clay particles, and the flood's fertilizer called silt.

Interactive 3.8 Ancient Egypt

Why do we know so much about Ancient Egypt? [Click here for more!](#)

Thanks to advancements in irrigation, the Egyptians were able to lessen their hunts for elephants, hippopotamus, and wild fowl. Their choice of foods started to vary. They continued to fish in the Nile River and later started to rely on meat from animals they raised like long-horned cattle, geese, sheep, and goats. Vegetables they grew were onions, leeks, garlic, beans, lettuce, lentils, cabbages, radishes, and turnips. They ate fruit mainly as a dessert. Their fruits were melons, plums, figs, grapes, and dates. They also grew grains like wheat, barley, and flax. They made bread and brewed beer from the grain. They spun the flax into linen, which they sewed into garments to wear, and other helpful cloth.

Government and Law

Before 3100 BCE, Egypt was two separate kingdoms with a huge desert between them. Deserts can be like a fence or wall protecting people from invasion. Joining forces with your neighbor builds an even bigger advantage: larger population, more land, additional resources, and the sharing of traditions and talents. Upper Egypt, in the south, had a ruler who wore a white crown while the ruler of the northern kingdom called Lower Egypt wore a red crown. A double crown was created with the combination of these two kingdoms.

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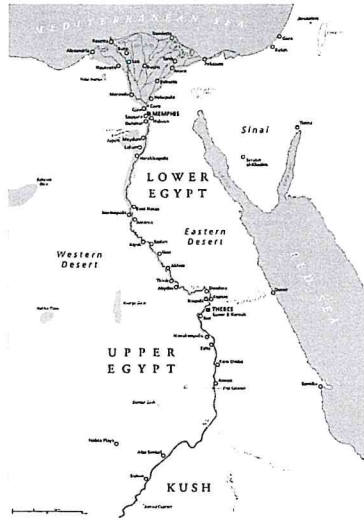


Image source: shutterstock

King Menes united the two main regions of Egypt and founded its first capital, a headquarters for government, at Memphis in about 3100 BCE.

"He became the first **pharaoh**, the Egyptian name for the ultimate ruler, and he wore the pschent, a crown that symbolized the union of the two regions of Egypt," According to authors Sara

Upper and Lower Egypt:

Are you confused about Upper and Lower Egypt? Then, think like an Egyptian. We usually print our maps with north at the top and, because of that, tend to think "up" when we think north. We even say, "up North" in Michigan. But for ancient Egyptians, the Nile River defined how they saw the world. There was upstream, or towards the source of the river, and downstream, or towards the mouth of the river. For the Nile, the mouth was in the North at the Mediterranean Sea. The source was in the South. For Egyptians, Upper Egypt was upstream in the South. Lower Egypt was downstream in the North.

Pendergast, Tom Pendergast, Drew D. Johnson, and Julie L. Carnagie.

Menes ruled Upper Egypt in the south, yet he saw the great trade potential in Lower Egypt, which was located to the north at the fertile delta region. The highway of the Nile connected not only the trade routes, but it allowed transport for their military and travel for all. The Nile's waters allowed much of Egypt to venture down their treasured river to the Mediterranean Sea.

Historians divide the years of Egyptian rule into three periods: the Old Kingdom from about 2700-2000 BCE, the Middle Kingdom which lasted from about 2000-1500 BCE, and the New Kingdom from 1500-750 BCE.

The Old Kingdom came first and formed the strong central government. The leaders of this period organized resources to allow for irrigation, extensive food storage, and great growth of the empire. They supervised the construction of the first great monuments of Egyptian architecture, the Great Pyramids. These marvels are located at Giza, which is on the west bank of the Nile near Egypt's current capital of Cairo. During the Old Kingdom Egyptians had followed the Sun King, Ra, and invented an accurate solar calendar. It is similar to the Gregorian calendar that we use today.

Egyptians of the Old Kingdom also made great advancements in art and culture.

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Achievements were made in literature and culture during the Middle Kingdom, yet this was a time of political unrest for Egypt. There were many contacts made between the Egyptians and the surrounding cultures in greater Arabia, Africa, and the Middle East. Egyptians borrowed customs from these other cultures and added them into their lives. Evidence of this cultural mosaic can be found in the artwork and writings from the time period. The Nubians from the south ruled for a short time. Next, the Semitic people from Levant, which is modern-day Syria and Lebanon, took control with their bronze weapons and compound bows until another shift of power came with the Hyksos. Egyptian culture remained prevalent until the Egyptians finally prevailed at the end of the Middle Kingdom.

During the New Kingdom, Egypt truly became an empire. After conquering neighbors to the south, Egypt expanded to other parts of Africa. Egypt gained great wealth during the New Kingdom, and wealthy Egyptians showed off their riches with lavish temples and they wore more highly decorated clothes.

Egyptian society began to weaken as the Kushites from the south gained prominence and then Egypt started to break down further after about 1000 BCE. Eventually Egypt was conquered by Macedonian leader Alexander the Great, whom you will read more about in the next chapter, in 332 BCE. The culture of Ancient Egypt slowly disappeared after Alexander's influence.



Image source: Egyptian limestone statue, about 1465 BCE

The New Kingdom saw the emergence of something somewhat unusual in Ancient Egypt or anywhere in the ancient world: female rulers. 1504-1482 BCE were the reigning years of Queen Hatshepsut, sometimes considered the world's first female leader. Pharaoh was a male term (like the word king) but Hatshepsut was referred to as pharaoh. She ruled as a regent for her young husband who was also her half-brother. A regent is appointed to rule because the monarch is a minor, or too young. Marriages were often political arrangements when they involved members of a ruling family and were often more about consolidating power by being associated with the right people than they were about marriage or love. The politics were complicated, but Hatshepsut, by all accounts, was an effective leader whom we know about in

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part, because of the record of her accomplishments preserved with her tomb; the same way we know about the accomplishments of other pharaohs.

Another strong female leader that ruled ancient Egypt as co-regent and as the pharaoh was Nefertiti. Historians have described her as one of the most significant of all Egyptian women. She and her husband, the pharaoh Akhenaton, started a new form of religion in their kingdom. It was a sort of revolution of faith changing the whole structure of their ancient culture. They moved the capital to from the original capital at Thebes to Amarna. The high priests had much less power under this new religious structure, and the main god was shifted to Aten, the sun god. Using evidence like hieroglyphics and wall paintings, it is clear that she played a large role in court. She carried out duties of the pharaoh, and she drove her own chariot. The artwork proves that she was powerful and independent. Women were not on the forefront of politics at this time. It is possible that her strong role during the reign of her husband upset the social hierarchy and caused conflict among government officials and high priests.

Writings about Nefertiti seem to just stop, yet the imagined details used to complete the mysterious missing information are quite intriguing. We do know that she was married to the pharaoh Akhenaten who reigned from 1353-1356 BCE. Some Egyptians



Image source: Shutterstock

believed that she had great divine power and was a daughter of the gods.

Nefertiti's story is being told with new uncovered evidence described in a powerful historical documentary. In the Valley of Kings, which is 400 miles south of Cairo, her mummy may have finally been identified. In the first few hundred years after her funeral, the royal tomb was found by grave robbers and her remains were mutilated. All the proof of rank had been torn away from her wrapped and preserved remains. The linen shroud and sacred wrappings were missing until recently. Two other mummies were in the same tomb and they were not harmed by

the ancient criminals. Jewels and amulets have been found separate from the body and these trinkets have been confirmed as Nefertiti's. Researchers could not positively confirm the identify the mummy until an English egyptologist named Joann Fletcher, (who specializes in ancient hair, its styling, and the wigs worn by people of ancient times) helped to make the connection between a wig that was likely Nefertiti's and the mummy's identity. Dr. Fletcher can confirm with forensic evidence that the wig is from 1400-1300 BCE and that it was created in Nubia for person of royalty.

The damage to the mummy thought to be Nefertiti's was likely inflicted by grave robbers because it is similar to how all the carved and painted images of her were damaged after her death. This vandalism is connected to the damage found in her royal tomb. As a woman that had gained a high level of authority, she may have offended certain people so much that they wanted to hurt her in the afterlife. Her mouth had the most damage, and that is important because the damage would not allow her to speak her name to the gods and enter into the afterlife.

Interactive 3.9 Female Rulers in the Ancient World



Female rulers were unusual in the ancient world, but have things changed that much? Think about these questions.

The Development of Cities

As you have already learned, King Menes founded the first capital of Egypt in Memphis, and, like so many other locations in ancient Egypt, being surrounded by so many deserts protected them from invasion and takeover. Water is the most basic of human needs, no matter what year you live in. Let's think about water and the quality of that water in today's world. We have more pollutants in our water, but, for Americans living in Michigan, access to the water of the Great Lakes is such a huge advantage. Access to water has to be reliable for the growth of a civilization. A huge group like the Ancient Egyptians could not build a capital without water. Without the Nile River, there would not have been the Egyptian Empire.

In ancient times, designing a good way to transport enough fresh water was a difficult challenge. For example, to keep an army hydrated during battles, leaders had many difficulties. The cities of Egypt were strategic in their design; these cities were rarely invaded due to their location. Power and protection go together! The cities were situated to support the travel, trade, transportation, and safety. These four factors were paramount in the location of their busy centers of Egyptian life.

Another major city of Egyptian civilization was Thebes. Thebes was the capital for hundreds of years during the reign of several pharaohs. The location was both strategic and hospitable to life in the Nile River Valley. It is over 400 miles south of Egypt's modern

capital, Cairo. On the east side of the river was the city for the living and on the west bank of the river was home to all the tombs and those involved in burial like the priests, embalmers, and workers. During the Middle Kingdom, a time period from about 2000 BCE to 1700 BCE, Thebes was where you'd find the Sphinxes and great temples. Thebes was ruled by Egyptians, but it was also taken over for time spans by the Hyksos, invaders from Asia, by the Assyrians, the Persians, and finally the Greeks. The Greeks had such a strong influence that the name Thebes is Greek. Today, Thebes is a small village in Egypt visited by tourists that come to visit the ruins. King Tutankhamen's tomb was discovered here in Thebes in 1922, less than 100 years ago. King Tut had quite a complicated family tree and the city of Thebes has a notable history, too.

Sometimes periods of change and unrest in a civilization can lead to the development of new cities. As you have already learned, the pharaoh Amenhotep IV and his queen Nefertiti created a new set of traditions based on the worship of the one god whom they called Aten. No one knows for certain why or to what extent this religious change from polytheism to monotheism, the worship of only one god, took place. But it was sincere enough, or an attempt to consolidate his power enough to cause Amenhotep IV to change his name to Akhenaten in honor of the one god of his monotheism efforts. He also began the building of the city of Amarna to honor the god Aten, not Amon-Re. This city was also called Tell el-Amarna and is believed to have been one of the first

planned settlements in all of human history; a fitting tribute to what is considered to be the earliest documentation of monotheistic religious beliefs in human history.

Akhenaten and Nefertiti paid for the new city's construction with the riches from the temples of Karnak. Karnak was the home to temples dedicated to other gods, but they were closed for 17 years during the rule of Akhenaten. The change to a new religious system had an economic impact, too.



image source: Shutterstock

Change often produces unrest and that was certainly the case here. This team of rulers, Akhenaten and Nefertiti, brought about a time of crisis and social disorder. With all this change the rulers

were forced to seek out protection from those who did not like their ideas. Amarna was surrounded by cliffs on three sides and the Nile on the fourth. The city was a fortress, or citadel.

Upon Akhenaten's death, Nefertiti returned to the previous capital of Thebes and ruled there for a year. Priests to the previous gods were still in Thebes when Nefertiti returned with the body of her husband, and her return may have signaled a return to previous religious practice. Akhenaten's son Tutankhamen, whom we would come to know as King Tut, would eventually consolidate his own power and rule from Thebes.

Hieroglyphics - Ancient Egypt's System of Writing

Texting, emails, tweets, and even handwritten notes share the thoughts of today, yet hieroglyphics told the tales of the Egyptians long ago. Hieroglyphics date back to the time of Upper Egypt during the reign of King Menes. Their writing system was a combination of symbols and pictures like animals, plants, and people. These detailed pictures were a way of describing their lives for more than thirty centuries. These hieroglyphs were found on tomb walls, in temples, on papyrus - a type of paper made from the reed, and most importantly in ornate burial chambers of the pharaohs. Can you imagine what the Egyptians would have done with emojis?

For centuries, the Egyptians also had a written language that was a mysterious series of pictures and symbols. The clues to their

meaning did not come until the discovery of a stone near Rosetta helped to "crack the code" and translate the ancient language. The social scientists that pieced together the meanings of hieroglyphics must have been thrilled, and today we know so much more now that we can read the writings on papyrus scrolls, tomb walls, and any other artwork that contains Egyptian hieroglyphics.

Papyrus may have been the world's first paper. Papyrus was a woven pattern of reeds that grew along the Nile's riverbanks. These peelings of the plant's layers were then dried in the sun to allow for a crisp surface with which to write. Papyrus was also used to make rope, mat rugs, and sandals. Papyrus and wheat were the best exports for Egypt.

Specialization and Social Systems

Ancient Egyptian civilization developed with many areas of specialization much like other civilizations. When you have specialization of labor, or a variety of jobs that are critical to the function of the civilization, different societies treat these talented artisans in their own ways. The rank or level of these specialists led to social hierarchies throughout the ancient world. A social hierarchy is sometimes referred to as a social pyramid. This is because it has just a few people on the top but many people at its foundation.

The social pyramid was a complex way of keeping order in Ancient Egypt. These classes of people were integral in both the government and faith of the civilization. The place of each person in the pyramid was largely determined by birth. Very few Egyptians moved up to a higher level in the social pyramid; a unique specialization, or skill was needed to be elevated from the level of their family. The viziers assisted the pharaohs and coordinated the collection of taxes and managed the work crews. The high priests had an amazing amount of power because the Egyptian people lived by just one faith. Officials, merchants, and scribes had unique talents that provided many of the needs and wants of their culture. The craftsmen created the products which were bought and sold and lent their skills to the massive decorative crafts like jewelry making and architectural design. Of course, the bottom of the pyramid had the greatest number of people, and these Egyptians worked hard throughout their lives with little freedoms and privileges. This lowest level workers farmed the fields and completed all the building projects for the pharaohs.

Architectural Achievements - The Pyramids

Pyramids held the most sacred treasures and were the most complex buildings of their times. Pyramids were the tombs, or burial spaces, for the body of their king, and these tombs served as a storage vault for the possessions they wished to have with them in the next world. These royal tombs had to be a fortress of

were taken as prisoners. These buildings had religious significance as they served as burial chambers for their rulers as they ascended into the next world, or the afterlife. Ramps, both internal and external, may have helped with the building of the pyramids. There are many different theories as to the exact technology used.

Another amazing achievement of Ancient Egypt is the Great Sphinx. The Great Sphinx was carved in the an area of the pyramids known as the Valley of Kings. No one knows the exact reasons for this statue, and there is even some debate about when it was created. Nothing has been found in any of the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic writings about its creation, but many believe it was carved by ancient Egyptians to be a guardian of the tombs there.

Giza became a small town when it became the desert home to the Great Pyramids and the Sphinx, but it wasn't like the cities of our times. It was more of a construction site with mini-camps for the different levels of slaves, workers, artisans, and managers of the projects.

Organized Religion

Much of the pyramid building was tied to ancient Egyptian beliefs about religion and the afterlife. Egyptians believed that their rulers were also gods. This belief in many gods is known as polytheism. The Egyptians believed that they needed to please the gods,

protection from grave robbers. There were mazes and false entry points, traps, and dangers set to snag a thief if they were brave enough to disrupt the eternal resting place of the godlike rulers. Originally just a pit in the dry sandy soil, later the Egyptians made buildings of brick and stone in which they buried their sacred rulers.



The Pyramids at Giza in Egypt are one of the Seven Wonders of the World. © SCULPIES/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM.

the camels give great perspective and scale, although camels are not native to Egypt.

Pyramid building was an amazing feat of ancient architecture and remains mysterious in many ways. The complex rank of the Egyptian culture created a workforce that was loyal to the leaders. These massive building projects were completed by thousands of lower ranking Egyptians and any outsiders that

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Many ceremonies and tributes were made to honor these gods. Many details about their beliefs are seen on sacred scrolls, artwork, and sculpture. As you have read, Egyptians believed that after they died a new life for them began, and this gave them a way to live forever. They traveled to another world in the afterlife and lived with the gods and goddesses of the dead. The mummification process is cleverly drawn and explained together with many facts about the Egyptian belief system and its pantheon of gods led by Ra, the sun god and the god of creation. He was called AmenRa during the Middle Kingdom. Osiris, Isis, Horus, Thoth, and Anubis are lesser gods, yet they all are involved in the lives of the Egyptians.

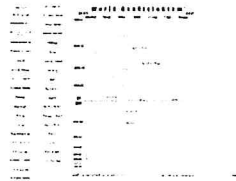
Mummification & preservation

Humans have many beliefs about life and what happens after death. To live forever in the afterlife, or next world, Egyptians believed that their soul had a number of parts. The ba and ka are two parts of the soul, and they had to be able to recognize their body; so they preserved, or mummified their bodies. The body of a pharaoh was treated with extra care as they thought that the ruler was a god. After a pharaoh died, organs were removed and stored in special containers called canopic jars. Then the body was dried out, rubbed with oils, and wrapped with long, narrow pieces of linen cloth. Mixed in the wrappings were jewels and special gifts. The name of the person was written on the cloth in hieroglyphics and a mask with a likeness was used to cover the

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head. While the embalmers worked for seventy days to preserve the body, there were priests that held rituals throughout the process. There were also skilled craftsmen like carpenters, sculptors, and painters that created a series of coffins for the body. The outermost coffin is called a sarcophagus. An elaborate funeral was held and the body was placed in a tomb with all the furniture, belongings, and food that might be needed in the afterlife. Pets and servants remains have been found alongside the rulers. The entrance to the tombs were concealed for protection, and the tombs needed an air shaft for the daily visits of the spiritual ba and ka. The religious beliefs of the Egyptians certainly made death an important part of life.

**Interactive 3.10 World
GeoHistoGram**



Fire up the GeoHistoGram again and this time click on both the Mesopotamia and Egypt buttons. What do you notice?