

## Outline 2.2 - Pyramids on the Nile

### I. The Geography of Egypt

#### A. Introductory Paragraph

1. From the highlands of East Africa to the Mediterranean Sea, the Nile River flows northward across Africa for over 4100 miles.
  - a) As a result, the Nile River is the longest river in the world.
2. The Nile River is a thin ribbon of water in a parched desert land, bringing water to Egypt from distant mountains, plateaus, and lakes.
  - a) The locations the Nile River brings water to are present-day Burundi, Tanzania, Uganda, and Ethiopia.
3. Egypt's settlements arose along the Nile on a narrow strip of land made fertile by the river.
  - a) The abrupt change from fertile soil to desert was so sudden that a person could stand with one foot in each.

#### B. The Gift of the Nile

1. Just like Mesopotamia, yearly flooding brought the water and rich soil that allowed settlements to grow and flourish.
  - a) Every year in July, rains and melting snow from the mountains of east Africa cause the Nile River to flood.
  - b) After the flood is over, it leaves behind a rich deposit of fertile black mud called silt.
2. Before the sun could dry the soil out, the peasants would prepare wheat and barley fields.
  - a) During the fall and winter, they watered crops via the irrigation ditch network.
  - b) The abundance of water in an otherwise-parched land was so great that Egyptians worshipped it as a god who gave life and rarely turned against them.
  - c) Egypt was the so-called "gift of the Nile."

#### C. Environmental Challenges

1. Egyptian farmers were much more fortunate than Mesopotamian ones.
  - a) The Tigris and Euphrates rivers were very unpredictable, while the Nile was extremely predictable, almost like clockwork.
2. Even then, living in Egypt did have its risks.
  - a) When the Nile's floods were a few feet lower than usual, the amount of silt and water was greatly reduced, causing starvation for thousands.
  - b) When the floods were a few feet higher, the excess water destroyed houses, granaries, and seeds.
  - c) The vast deserts were natural barriers between Egypt and other lands. As a result, the Egyptians lived on a very small portion of the

land, and generally did not interact with other people.

3. Though, the deserts did shut out invaders.

a) For much of its early history, Egypt was spared in the constant warfare in the Fertile Crescent.

#### D. Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt

1. Ancient Egyptians lived along the Nile from the mouth well into the interior of Africa.

a) River travel was common, but it ended where the Nile's boulders started turning the rivers into churning rapids called cataracts.

b) As a result, riverboats could not pass this spot, known as the First Cataract, to travel upstream further into Africa.

2. Between the First Cataract and Mediterranean were two different regions.

a) Because the elevation was higher, the river area in the south is called Upper Egypt.

b) Upper Egypt is a skinny strip of land that stretches from the 1st Cataract to where the river branches out.

c) Lower Egypt is where the Nile delta region is, near the sea.

d) The delta begins ~100 miles before the river enters the Mediterranean.

e) The delta is a broad, marshy, and triangular area formed by deposits of silt at the river mouth.

3. The Nile provided a reliable system of transportation between Upper and Lower Egypt.

a) The Nile flows north, so northbound boats simply drifted with the current.

b) Southbound boats had to use a wide sail, because prevailing winds in Egypt blew from north to south.

c) This carried the sailboats upwards against the river current.

d) The ease of transportation made possible by the Nile helped unify Egypt and also promote trade.

## II. Egypt Unites into a Kingdom

### A. Introductory Paragraph

1. Egyptians lived in farming villages as far back as 5000 BC, perhaps earlier.

a) Each village had its own rituals, gods, and chiefs.

b) By ~3200 BC, Egyptian villages were ruled by 2 kingdoms, Lower and Upper Egypt.

2. Lower and Upper Egypt were eventually united, but we're not sure who, because there is conflicting historical evidence.

a) Some evidence points to a king named Scorpion.

b) Other, more solid evidence points to a king named Narmer.

3. The king of Lower Egypt wore a red crown, and the king of Upper Egypt wore a tall, white crown shaped like a bowling pin.

- a) There exists a slate with Narmer wearing the crowns of Lower and Upper Egypt on opposite sides, probably signifying the unification of Egypt at ~3000 BC.
- 4. Narmer created a double-crown from the red and white crowns, symbolising an united kingdom.
  - a) He settled his capital, Memphis, near the area where Upper and Lower Egypt met, and established the first Egyptian dynasty.
  - b) Eventually, the history of ancient Egypt would consist of 31 dynasties over 2600 years.
- 5. Historians say that Egypt's great civilisation was set during ~3200~2700 BC.
  - a) The Old Kingdom would last from ~2660~2180 BC.

#### B. Pharaohs Rule as Gods

- 1. A major difference between Egypt and Mesopotamia is the role of the king.
  - a) Mesopotamian kings were representatives of the gods.
  - b) Egyptian kings /were/ gods, called pharaohs. They were thought to be just as powerful as the gods in heaven.
- 2. This type of government that has rule based on religion is called a theocracy.
  - a) The pharaoh was the center of Egypt's religion, army, and government.
  - b) They bore full responsibility for the kingdom's well-being.
- 3. Egyptians believe that the pharaoh was the one who caused the sun to rise, the Nile to flood, and the crops to grow.
  - a) It was his duty to promote truth and justice.

#### C. Builders of the Pyramids

- 1. Egyptians believed that their king ruled even after his death.
  - a) He had eternal life force (ka), which would still take part in the governing of Egypt.
  - b) The ka remained much like a living king in needs and pleasures, so their tombs were often more important than their palaces.
- 2. Old Kingdom kings had tombs located in large structures called pyramids.
  - a) The Old Kingdom was the age of great pyramid building in ancient Egypt.
  - b) They were remarkable engineering achievements, as the Egyptians had not yet had the wheel.
  - c) Unlike Sumerians, Egyptians actually had a good supply of stone (granite and limestone).
- 3. For the Great Pyramid of Giza, the limestone facing was quarried from across the Nile.
  - a) Each block was perfectly cut, and weighed at least 2.5 tons.
  - b) Some weighed as much as 15 tons.
  - c) More than 2 million of these blocks were stacked precisely to ~481

feet, covering more than 13 acres.

4. These pyramids show the strength of the Egyptian civilisation.
  - a) They show that they are economically and technologically capable to support massive public works projects like this.
  - b) They also show that there is sufficient leadership and government to organise such large projects.

### III. Egyptian Culture

#### A. Introductory Paragraph

1. Because nature was in their favor, Egyptians tended to approach life more confidently and optimistically compared to others in the Fertile Crescent.
  - a) Religion played an important role in Egyptian lives.

#### B. Religion and Life

1. Like Mesopotamians, early Egyptians were polytheistic.
  - a) The most important gods were Re, the sun god, and Osiris, the god of death.
  - b) The most important goddess was Isis, representing the idea mother and wife.
2. Combined, Egyptians worshipped more than 2000 gods/goddesses.
  - a) Huge temples were built to honor the major deities.
3. Egyptians believed in an afterlife, unlike the Mesopotamians.
  - a) Egyptians believed they would be judged for their deeds when they die.
  - b) Anubis, god of the underworld, would weigh each person's heart. For eternal life, the heart must weigh less than a feather.
  - c) If it was heavy with sin, the Devourer of Souls would eat the heart.
4. The afterlife was called the Other World.
  - a) People in all classes prepared for their burials to reach the Other World.
  - b) Kings and queens built huge tombs like the pyramids, and other Egyptians built smaller tombs.
  - c) Royal/elite Egyptians' bodies were preserved via mummification, which involved embalming and drying the corpse to prevent decay.
5. Scholars accept Herodotus's description of the mummification process.
  - a) Brains are drawn out of the nostril via an iron hook.
  - b) They make an incision in the side using a stone and take out all the bowels.
  - c) Fill the belly with pure myrrh, cassia, and other perfumes, then sew it up.
  - d) Steep it in natron (a mineral salt), and leave it there for 70 days.
  - e) After 70 days, wash the corpse and wrap it up in waxed bandages.
6. The mummy was placed inside a coffin, inside a tomb, then filled the tomb with items the person would use in the afterlife.
  - a) These things could be food, clothing, cosmetics, and jewelry.

- b) Many purchased scrolls containing hymns, prayers, and magic spells to guide the soul in the afterlife.
- c) This was called the Book of the Dead.

#### IV. Life in Egyptian Society

##### A. Introductory Paragraph

1. Egyptian society formed a pyramid, just like the monuments of the kings and queens.
  - a) King, queen, royal family were at the top.
  - b) Upper class (landowners, government officials, priests, army commanders) were below them.
  - c) Middle class (merchants and artisans) were below them.
  - d) Lower class (farmers and laborers) were at the lowest, and had the most people.
2. Slavery became popular for labor later in society.
  - a) Slaves usually were captives from foreign wars, and served in the homes of the rich, or toiled endlessly in the gold mines of Upper Egypt.
  - b) People were not locked into their social classes. You can gain higher status via marriage or success in their jobs.
  - c) Even slaves could potentially earn their freedom for their loyal service.
3. Being literate was a key ability required to obtain the highest position in the government.
  - a) Careers would open in the army, royal treasury, priesthood, and the king's court just for being literate.
4. Women in Egypt were treated just as well as men during this time as well.
  - a) They could own and trade property and propose marriage/divorce if she were a middle-class/wealthy woman.
  - b) If she was granted a divorce, she would get 1/3rd of the couple's property.

##### B. Egyptian Writing

1. Simple pictographs, not unlike the Mesopotamian cuneiform, were the beginning of writing in Egypt.
  - a) Scribes developed a more flexible writing system called hieroglyphics (sacred carving).
2. Just like Cuneiform, each symbol in Hieroglyphics had a meaning behind it.
  - a) However, it could also be used as a alphabet-based language.
  - b) For example, the owl could be the actual bird, or it could an m sound.
3. Originally these were written on stone/clay tablets, but soon moved to papyrus reeds, a better writing surface.
  - a) Papyrus grew in the marshy delta.

- b) Egyptians would split these reeds into narrow strips, flatten them, then place them crosswise in two layers. They would then damp, press, then dry them into a paper-like sheet.

### C. Egyptian Science and Technology

1. The practical needs of the Egyptian people led to many Egyptian inventions.
  - a) For example, a calendar was developed to keep track of the time between floods to plan their planting seasons.
  - b) Priests observed that the same star, Sirius, appeared above the eastern horizon right before a flood would occur.
2. Priests calculated the number of days between one rising of the star to the next as 365 days, a solar year.
  - a) This was divided into 12 months of 30 days each, with 5 days added for holidays and feasting.
  - b) This was so accurate that it was only short of the true solar year by 6 hours.
3. Egyptians also developed a system of written numbers for counting, adding, and subtracting.
  - a) This system would have helped in assessing and collecting taxes.
  - b) Scribes used early geometry to survey and reset property boundaries after annual floods.
4. Mathematics helped Egypt's skilled engineers and architects make accurate measurements to construct their pyramids and palaces.
  - a) Egyptian architecture was the first to feature stone columns in homes, palaces, temples, and other structures.
5. Egyptian medicine was also famous in the ancient world.
  - a) Doctors could check a person's heart rate by checking for a pulse in various parts of the body.
  - b) They supported broken bones with splints and had effective treatments for wounds and fevers.
  - c) There were also surgeries performed to treat certain conditions.

### V. Invaders Control Egypt

#### A. Introductory Paragraph

1. The power of the pharaohs ended up declining at ~2180 BC, marking the conclusion of the Old Kingdom.
  - a) Stronger pharaohs regained control during the Middle Kingdom (~2040~1640 BC), and restored law and order.
  - b) Trade/transportation was improved by digging a canal from the Nile to the Red Sea.
2. Irrigation was achieved by building huge dikes to trap and channel the Nile's floodwaters.
  - a) Thousands of acres of new farmland was created by draining the swamps of Lower Egypt.

3. However, the Middle Kingdom's prosperity did not last. In ~1640 BC, people from the Palestines moved across the Isthmus of Suez into Egypt.
  - a) They were the Hyksos, the "rulers of foreign lands."
  - b) They ended up ruling most of Egypt from 1630~1523 BC.
4. Egypt would rise into power and glory again in the New Kingdom later on in time.
  - a) However, when the Old Kingdom was happening in Egypt, civilisation began to emerge in the Indus River Valley.

## VI. Social History - Work and Play in Ancient Egypt

### A. Introductory Paragraph

1. For ancient Egyptians, life usually involved hard work.
  - a) When the weather was good, most worked in the fields, producing food for consumption and for exporting.
  - b) During flood season, thousands of farmers were called to help build pharaohs' temples.
2. However, life was not all about work.
  - a) There is evidence that upper-class Egyptians and the plebians had ways to enjoy themselves too.

### B. Farmers

1. Egyptian farmers grew enough wheat and barley to have food reserves for themselves and to export.
  - a) They also grew fruits and vegetables in irrigated fields.

### C. Games

1. Games were popular in all Egyptian classes.
  - a) They often played Senet, a game where you throw sticks or knuckle bones to move pieces through squares of good/bad fortune.
  - b) A player would win by moving all of their pieces off the board.

### D. Cosmetics

1. Cosmetics were used for both work and play.
  - a) They protected workers from the sun and heat, and were used to enhance beauty.
  - b) Both men and women applied makeup (kohl) to their eyes.
  - c) Kohl was made from minerals mixed with water.
2. Flowers and fragrant woods were also soaked in oil and rubbed into the skin.
  - a) This helped protect their skin from the dry air. The dark eye makeup also helped soften the glare.
  - b) Cosmetics were kept in chests.

### E. Temple Builders

1. An artist drew a visualisation of how the Karnak Temple Complex may have looked, and why it would have required thousands of laborers to build.

- a) Some historians say that the laborers may have been part of a rotating workforce drafted from agricultural classes in Egypt, a type of community service.

## VII. Information Boxes

### A. Connect to Today - Scorpion King

1. In 1999, Egyptologists found some carvings on a piece of rock that had symbols possibly referring to a king named Scorpion.
  - a) It featured a figure carrying a staff, but with a scorpion near its head.
2. A macehead was also found sporting a king with the scorpion symbol.
  - a) A conclusion can be drawn that Egyptian history may stretch back to ~3250 BC.
3. Some scholars say that the Scorpion King was the first one to begin unification of Egypt.

### B. History in Depth - Pyramids and Mummies

1. The stones of the pyramids often had the names of the teams of workers that worked on them.
  - a) Some examples were “the Vigorous Gang,” “the Enduring Gang,” and “the Craftsman Gang.”
  - b) Just like how modern workers leave their marks on what they build, it seems that early pyramid builders did so as well.
2. The builders were mostly peasants, working for the government when the Nile was in flood, and they were unable to farm.
  - a) In return for this labor, the country provided the workers with shelter and food during this time.
3. The largest of the pyramids is the Great Pyramid at Giza, completed at ~2556 BC.
  - a) Specific clay vessels are called Canopic jars. These are used to place the extracted brain, liver, and other internal organs of the mummy in the jar.
  - b) Mummification existed so that the soul could return to the body later.
  - c) Egyptian embalmers were so skillful that some well-preserved mummies still had hair, skin and teeth.
  - d) A solid gold mask of the pharaoh Tutankhamen weighs 22.04 pounds, and is an exhibit at a popular museum in Cairo.

### C. History in Depth - The Rosetta Stone

1. In 1799, near Rosetta, some French soldiers found a polished black stone with a message in 3 languages.
  - a) One was in hieroglyphics.
  - b) The 2nd was in simplified hieroglyphics.
  - c) The third was in ancient Greek.
2. Because ancient Greek is a well-known language, clues to the



hieroglyphics' meanings were provided.

- a) Even with this massive clue, deciphering the Rosetta Stone still took many years.
- b) It was finally broken in 1822 by a French scholar named Jean Francois Champollion.