

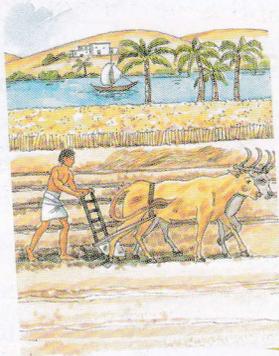
14 – The Ancient Egyptians



✿ An Ancient Civilisation

Egypt is in the Sahara Desert. The longest river in the world, the Nile, cuts through the Sahara. About 5,000 years ago, prehistoric hunters came from central Africa and settled along the banks of the Nile.

The Nile provided water to drink and wash in. More importantly, it flooded annually and deposited fertile mud along its banks. This made the area suitable for growing crops and raising animals. The people built their mud brick, flat-roofed houses on higher land away from the banks. Farmers grew wheat, barley, flax, onions, cabbage, lentils, cucumbers, fruit and grapes for wine. The Nile provided the Egyptians with a rich, green valley in the middle of the desert.



✿ The Pharaohs

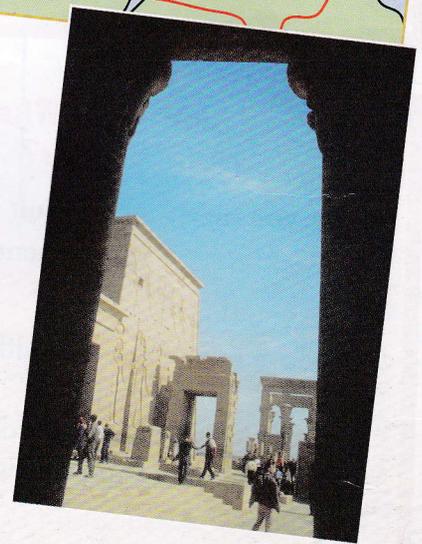
Egypt was ruled by families or “dynasties”. The head of these families was the king. He was called the pharaoh. The Egyptians believed that the pharaoh was descended from the sun god Ra. The pharaoh was a kind of god. He acted as a link between the Egyptians and the gods and he controlled the yearly floods of the Nile.

The pharaoh was in charge of the government. He was enormously wealthy and owned everything in Egypt. The pharaohs created a huge empire by conquering neighbouring tribes. Captives from these tribes were used as slaves.

The pharaoh had many wives but only one queen. She was usually the eldest daughter of the last king and queen! The pharaoh wore a double crown, a false beard, flowing robes and spectacular jewels.



▲ Pharaoh



▲ The Temple of Isis

✿ Egyptian Temples

Temples were houses of the gods and goddesses built by the pharaohs. The priests were the only ones allowed inside. They wakened the statue of the god in the morning, washed it, anointed it with perfume, dressed it and left food for it. Food which was left uneaten, they ate themselves! The ordinary Egyptians only saw the gods during annual festivals when the statues were carried around the countryside.

Did You Know?

Flax is used to make linen. Egypt today has an important linen and cotton industry

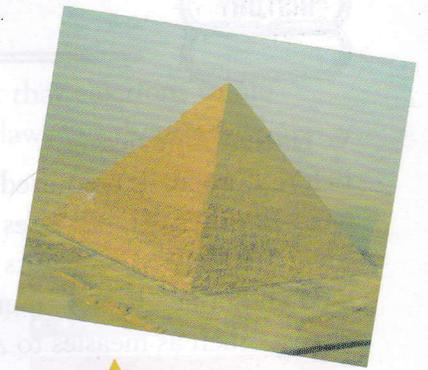
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Life After Death

The Egyptians believed in a life after death where they would live in a beautiful land with the gods. They preserved dead bodies for the afterlife by mummifying them. They were buried with their possessions because they would need them in the afterlife. When a pharaoh died, a lot of his wealth was buried with him.

The pharaohs were buried in huge pyramids. The higher the pyramid, the closer they would be to heaven. Ordinary Egyptian men and slaves built them almost 5,000 years ago. Thirty of them still exist today. The most famous of these are the three pyramids of Giza, near Cairo.

Later the pharaohs were buried in underground tombs cut into bare rocky cliffs in the Valley of the Kings. The walls and ceilings were covered in elaborate paintings. The queens and royal children were buried in the Valley of the Queens, a kilometre and a half away. The tombs of pharaohs and other royal people were heavily guarded, but this did not stop the grave robbers. Most of the graves were cleaned out!



▲ Egyptian pyramid

Four Steps To Make A Mummy

1. They took the insides out, dried them and put them in **canopic jars**. The only organ they left in the body was the heart, because that was where all the wisdom was.
3. They covered the body in a salt paste called natron. They left it for ten more days.

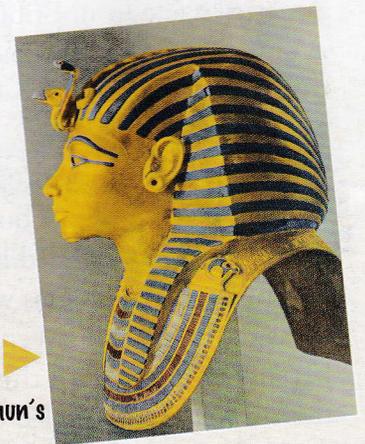


2. They rinsed out the body with palm wine. Then they left it to dry for 40 days.
4. They wrapped the body in linen bandages. This took 15 days. Then they put it in a decorated stone or wooden box called a sarcophagus and brought it to the grave.



Tutankhamun's Tomb

Tutankhamun was a boy-pharaoh who died when he was 19. Historians think that he might have died as a result of an axe wound to the head. In 1922 King Tutankhamun's tomb was found totally intact in the Valley of the Kings. It was discovered by an English archaeologist called Howard Carter. It had never been found or looted by robbers. It still contained the mummy and his treasure. One layer of King Tutankhamun's coffin was made of 110kg of gold. No wonder grave robbing was so popular!



▶ Tutankhamun's mask

Exercises

1. About how old is Egyptian civilisation?
2. Who was the pharaoh?
3. What were the pharaoh's duties?
4. Where were pharaohs buried?
5. Why were the tombs robbed?
6. What is a sarcophagus?
7. How might Tutankhamun have died?

Dictionary

Canopic jars: Covered jars used to hold the internal organs of the mummified body.