

History Level 7

Chapter 2 — the ancient line

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.

Attribution: Classbasics Pty Ltd, vwx.au

Curriculum codes refer to the *Victorian Curriculum F–10 Version 2.0*, published by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA). Classbasics is not affiliated with the VCAA; the VCAA does not endorse this resource and makes no warranties regarding it.

Distribution note: this document may be distributed, and whole pages may be removed from it, provided only WHOLE pages are removed (never part of a page). This allows teachers to remove tests, exams and subtopics they do not want to issue.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content has been excluded as accuracy cannot be guaranteed, and it is better to be respectful than cover the entire curriculum inaccurately.

Significant effort has been made to ensure this content is legal. Please send any areas of concern to admin@vwx.au with appropriate document/legal references so errors can be verified and changes be made.

Contents

Section	Page
How the land and the Nile shaped ancient Egypt	2
Ancient Egypt's society: how it worked and who mattered	16
Ancient Egyptian beliefs: everyday life, death and burial	27
Egypt's turning points: events that changed the society	42
Contact, conflict, conquest and trade: ancient Egypt and other societies	51
Significant individuals and groups who changed ancient Egypt	61
What Egypt left behind: legacies and changing interpretations	71

How the land and the Nile shaped ancient Egypt

Section 2A · Historical Knowledge and Understanding · Investigation: Ancient societies (10 000 BCE – 600 CE) · History 7

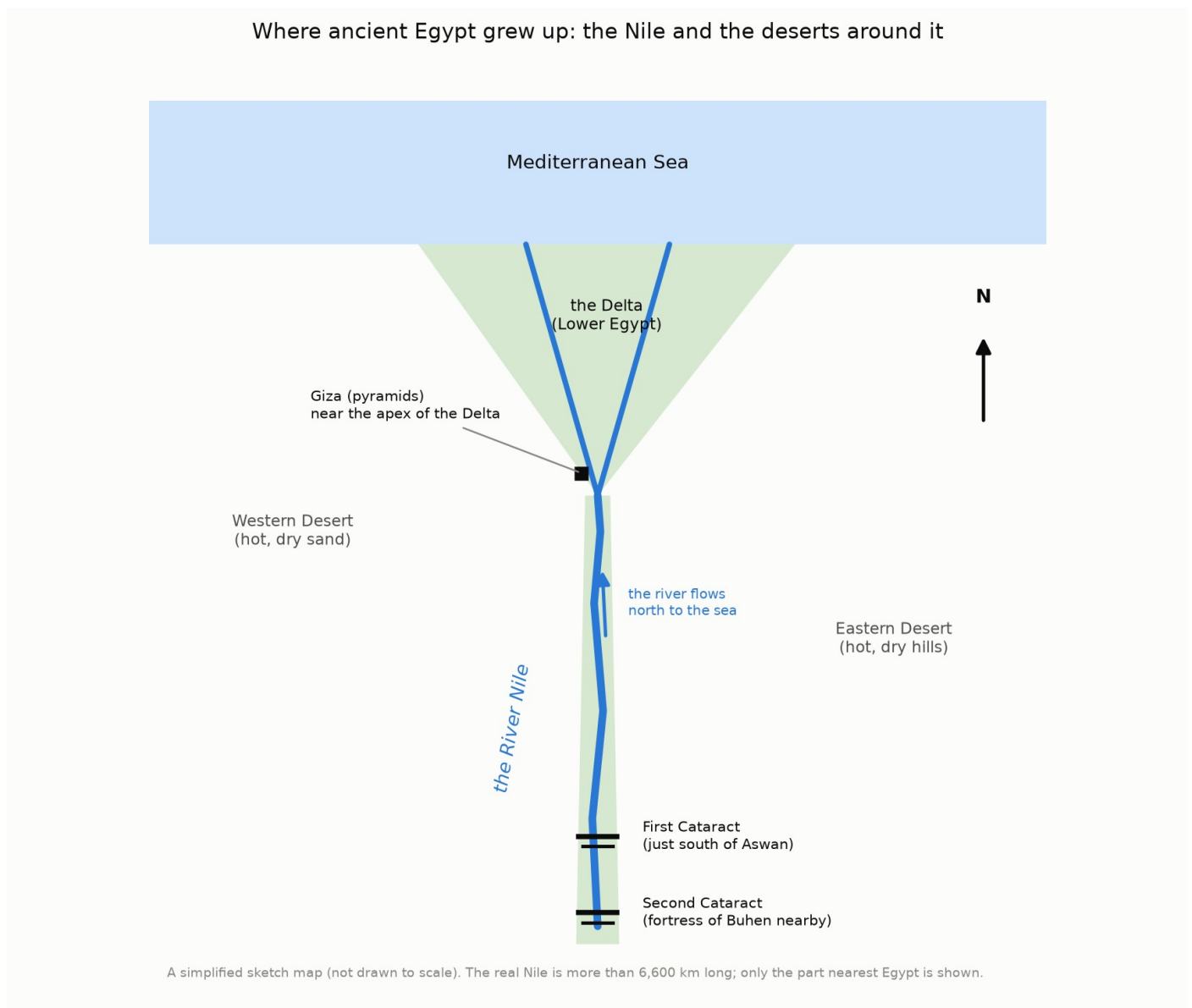
This section owns **VC2HH8K12**, taught through ancient Egypt. It teaches the two Egypt-labelled elaborations of this CD, .E03 and .E04. The other menu ids of this CD (.E01–.E02 China, .E05–.E06 Greece, .E07–.E08 India, .E09–.E11 Rome) are linkage keys only and are not taught here.

Ancient Egypt grew up along one river. Almost everything about the society — its food, its transport, its safety, even its gods — began with the Nile and the way the land around it sits. This section follows the river from the flood that came each year to the society it made possible.

Teaching sequence

Part 1 — The river and its flood

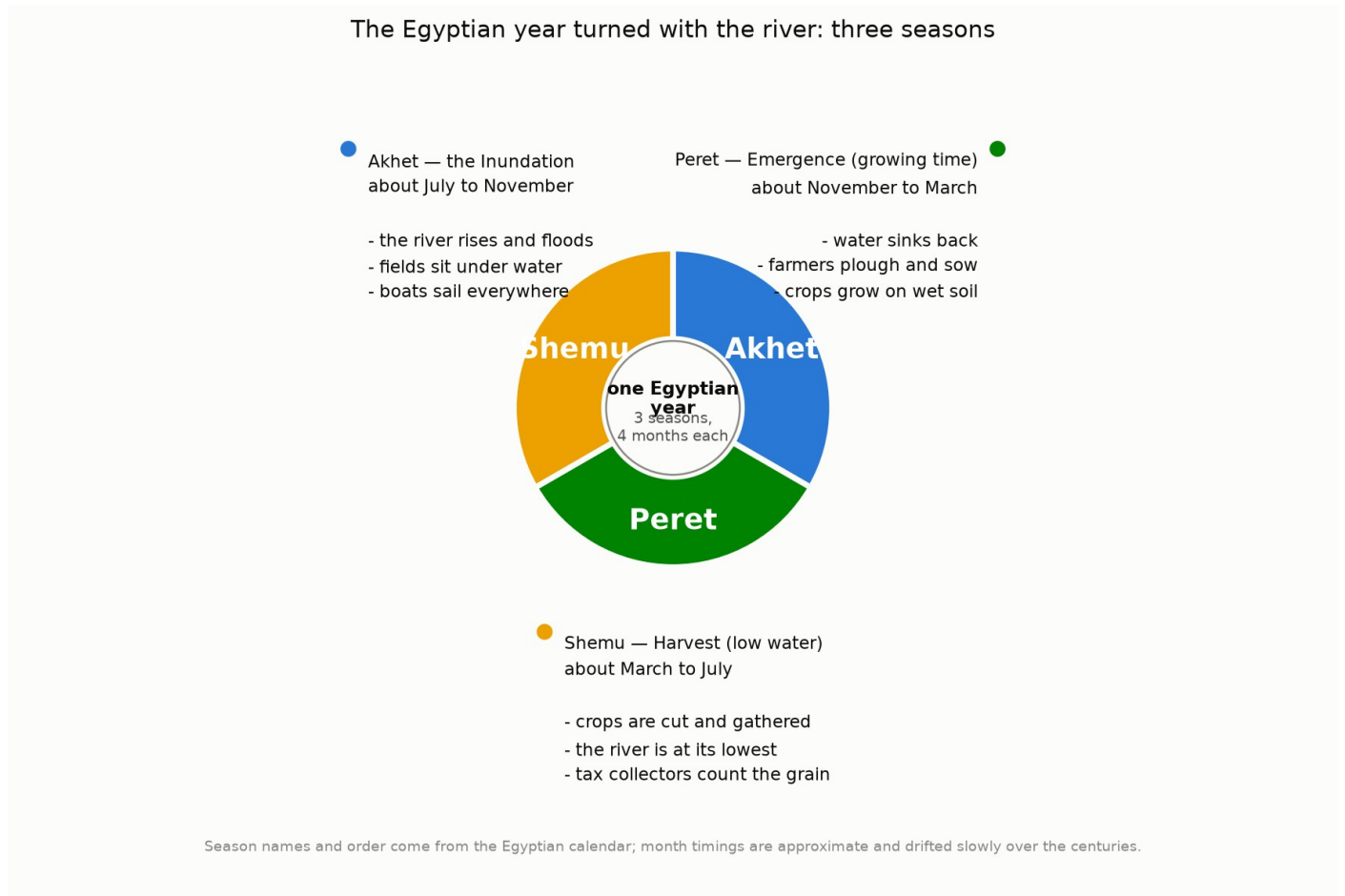
The Nile is one of the longest rivers in the world — more than 6,600 kilometres long. It flows **north**, from the high lands in the south down to the Mediterranean Sea. Where the river meets the sea it fans out into a triangle of rich farmland called the **delta**. The delta and the land near the sea were Lower Egypt; the narrow green strip along the river further south was Upper Egypt.



Sketch map of the Nile valley: the river flows north from the First Cataract past Giza to the delta and the Mediterranean Sea, with the Second Cataract and the fort of Buhen to the south and deserts on both sides

Each year, between about July and November, the river rose and spilled over its banks. This flood — which returned every year — is called the **inundation**. The water came from heavy rains far to the south, in the highlands where the river begins. The flood carried fine, rich mud called **silt**. When the water sank back, it left the silt on the fields — new soil, full of food for plants, ready for sowing.

The Egyptians built their year around the river. Their calendar had three seasons of four months each: **Akhet**, the inundation; **Peret**, the growing time when the water sank back; and **Shemu**, the harvest, when the river was lowest.



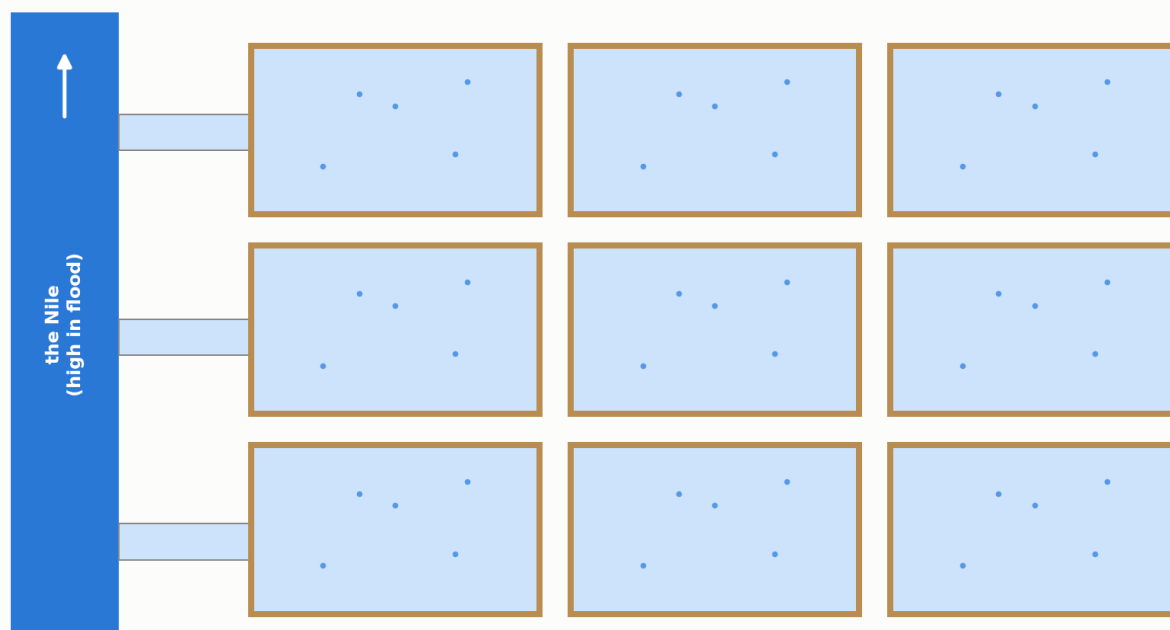
Ring diagram of the three seasons of the Egyptian year: Akhet the inundation (about July to November), Peret the growing time (about November to March) and Shemu the harvest (about March to July), with what happened on the fields in each

Farmers did not just wait for the flood. They dug canals and built low earthen walls around their fields to trap the water and let it soak in. This system is called **basin irrigation**. It meant the fields soaked up as much water and silt as they could hold, even in years when the flood was smaller.

Basin irrigation: trapping the flood to water and feed the fields

canals carry flood water into the basins

each square is a field basin ringed by an earthen wall



- 1 Flood water is let in and held in the basins
- 2 The soil soaks up water; rich silt settles
- 3 Left-over water drains on; farmers plough and sow

 basin holding flood water

 earthen wall

 the river in flood

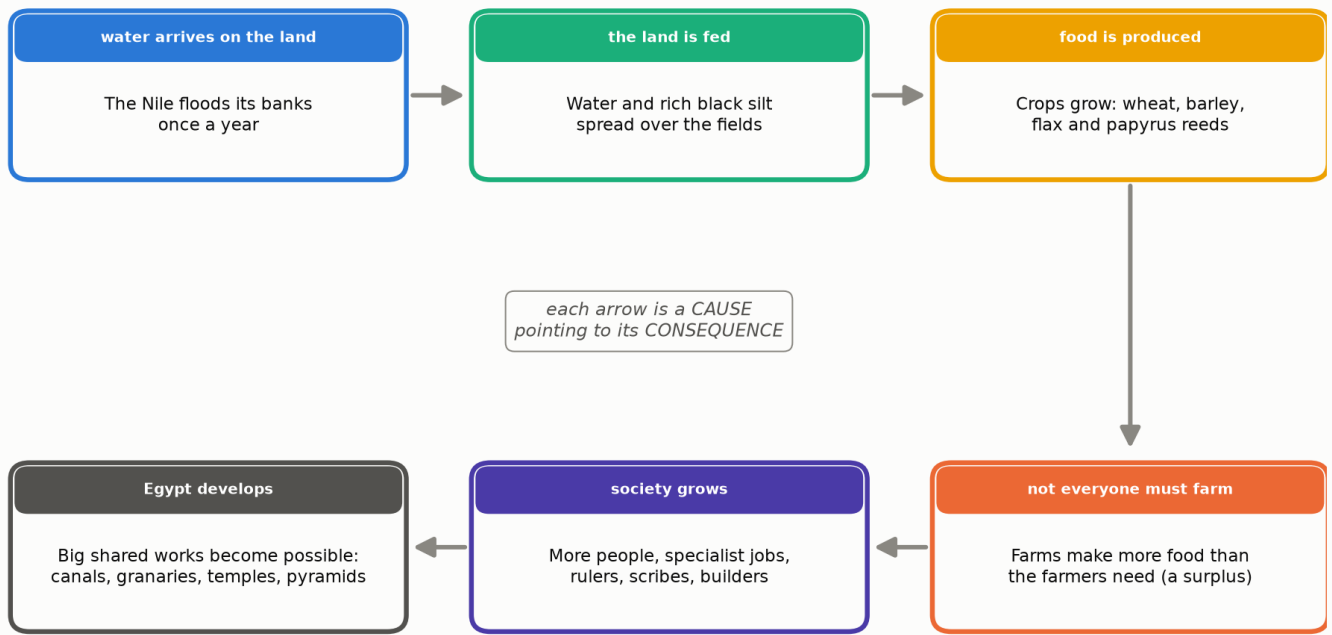
Plan view of basin irrigation: canals lead flood water into a grid of walled basins; the steps show the walls holding the water, the soil soaking it up while silt settles, then the water draining on so farmers can sow

On this watered soil the farmers grew wheat and barley (for bread and beer), flax (a plant used for rope and linen cloth) and **papyrus** — a tall reed from the riverbanks that was made into boats, mats, rope and a paper-like writing material. Bread and beer were the staples of the Egyptian table.

Part 2 — From full stomachs to a first nation

The river's gifts led, step by step, to a rich and organised society. Historians call each step a **cause** and the next step its **consequence**.

From one river to one society: a chain of causes and consequences

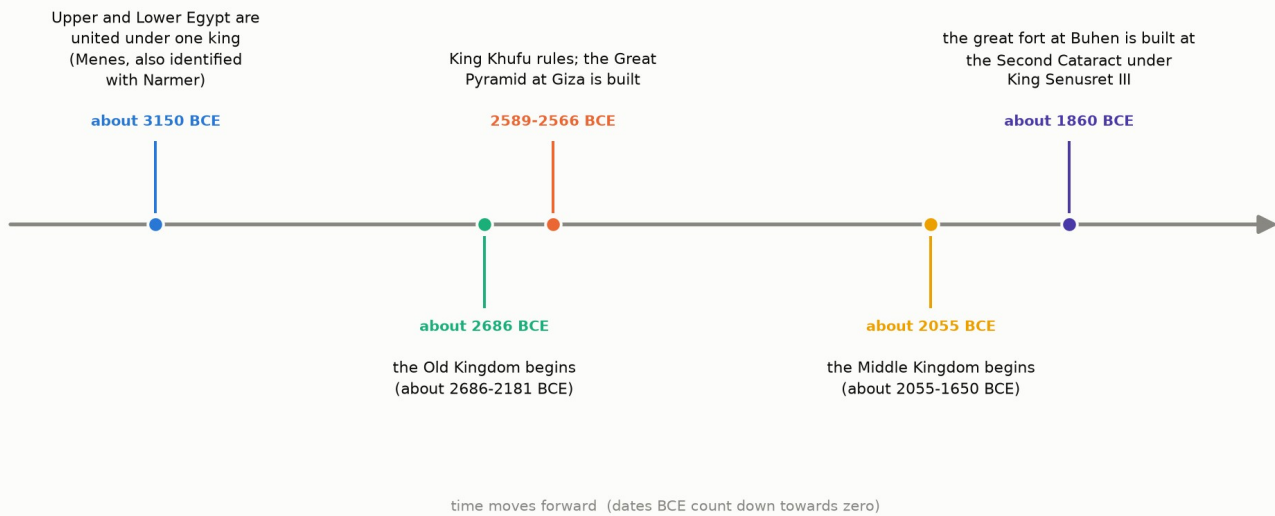


Cause-and-consequence chain: the Nile floods each year brings water and black silt, which grows crops; the crops leave a surplus; the surplus allows more people and specialist jobs; that leads to big shared works such as canals, granaries, temples and pyramids

Because food was reliable, the population grew. Because there was a **surplus** — more food than the farming families needed to eat — some people could stop farming and do other jobs: potters, cloth-makers, builders, soldiers, priests, rulers and **scribes** (trained writers who kept the kingdom's records). Rulers collected part of the surplus as tax, stored it in **granaries** (storehouses for grain), and used it to pay for big shared works — canals, granaries, temples and, later, the pyramids at Giza. A line of rulers from the same family is called a **dynasty**.

The timeline below pairs with the timeline work in section 5B. Remember that BCE dates count down towards zero: 3150 BCE is *earlier* than 1860 BCE.

Egypt develops along its river: a timeline of key moments (all dates approximate)



Timeline of key moments: about 3150 BCE Upper and Lower Egypt are united under one king (Menes, also identified with Narmer); about 2686 BCE the Old Kingdom begins; 2589-2566 BCE King Khufu rules and the Great Pyramid at Giza is built; about 2055 BCE the Middle Kingdom begins; about 1860 BCE the great fort at Buhen is built at the Second Cataract under King Senusret III

Around 3150 BCE, Upper and Lower Egypt were united under one king — Menes, who most historians identify with Narmer. The river helped here too: because boats could move the whole length of the country, one government could reach, tax and rule both ends of the long, thin kingdom.

Part 3 — A two-way highway

The Nile was Egypt's main road. The current flows north, so boats heading north simply drifted with it, helped by oars. For much of the year the wind blows from the north, so boats heading south raised a sail and let the wind push them up the river. Heavy loads — grain, stone for building, people — moved by boat far more easily than by land.

A two-way highway: the river and the wind did the work

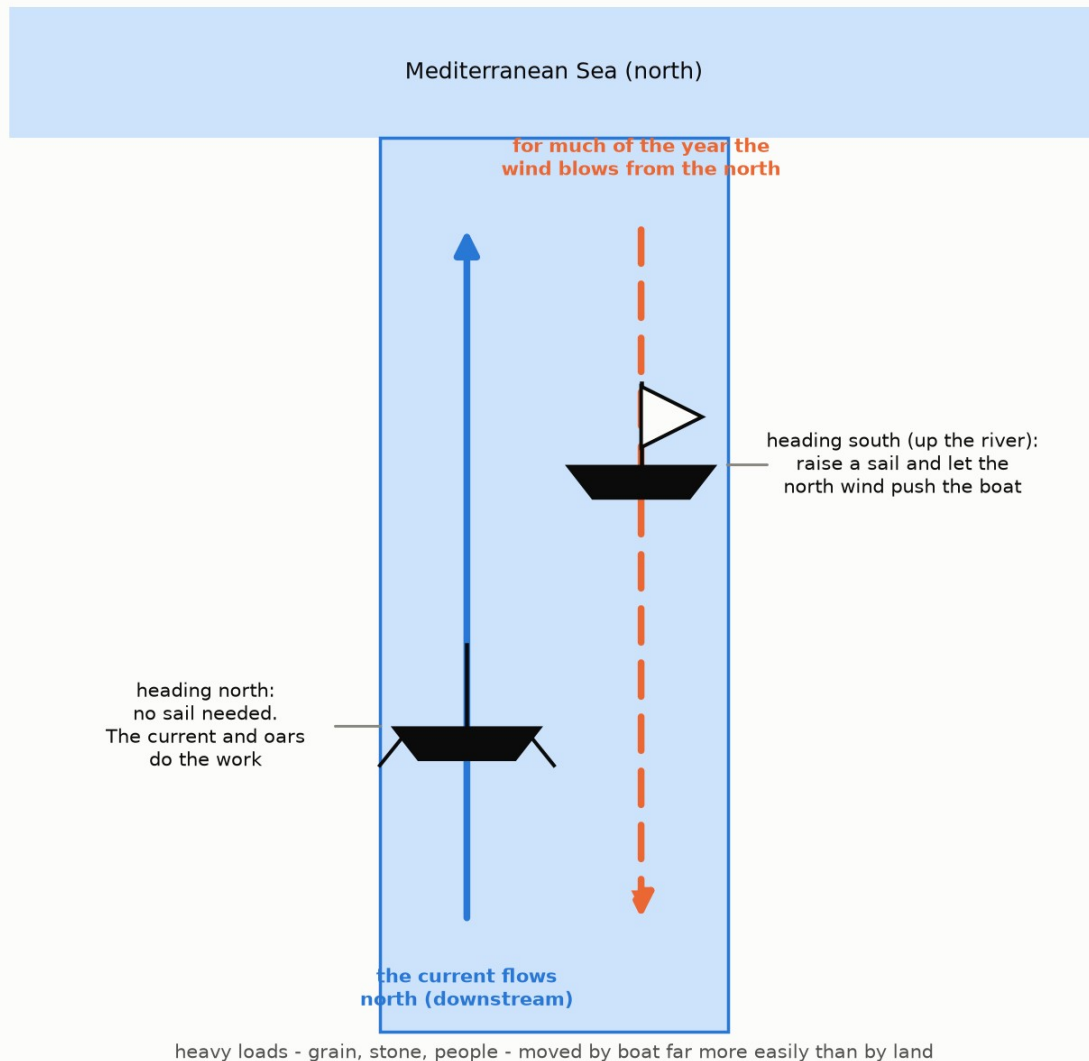


Diagram of the Nile as a two-way highway: the current flows north so boats drift north with oars, while for much of the year the wind blows from the north so sailing boats are pushed south

That two-way highway carried trade, messages and armies, and it tied the long kingdom together.

Part 4 — Protected by the land

The lands around Egypt were hard to attack. Deserts lay to the east and west, and to the south the river itself broke into **cataracts** — shallow, rocky stretches of rapids where boats struggle to pass. There are six cataracts between the south and the town of Aswan. The cataracts worked as a natural barrier at Egypt's southern border, and Egyptian kings added to it by building walled forts there. The great fort at Buhen, at the Second Cataract, was built in about 1860 BCE under King Senusret III to guard that border. These barriers gave Egypt long stretches of peace in which to farm, build and develop.

Barriers around Egypt: hard country to attack

The Western Desert

a huge sea of dry sand west of the river. Armies could not march far across it without water.

The Eastern Desert

dry hills between the river and the Red Sea. They slowed any attack coming from the east.

The cataracts in the south

six shallow, rocky stretches of river where boats struggled to pass. They made a natural barrier at Egypt's southern border.

Forts at the cataracts

kings also built walled forts at the cataracts. The great fort at Buhen, at the Second Cataract, was built in about 1860 BCE to guard the border.

The desert and the river barriers gave Egypt long stretches of peace in which to develop.

Four barrier cards: the Western Desert, the Eastern Desert, the cataracts in the south as a natural barrier, and forts at the cataracts such as Buhen at the Second Cataract (about 1860 BCE)

Part 5 — A river treated as a god

The inundation mattered so much that the Egyptians thanked gods for it. **Hapi** was the god of the inundation itself. **Khnum**, a ram-headed god, was believed to control how high the flood rose. **Satet** guarded the southern border and came to stand for the flood as well. All three were honoured together at Elephantine, the island by the First Cataract — right where the flood entered Egypt.

Gods of the river: Hapi, Khnum and Satet

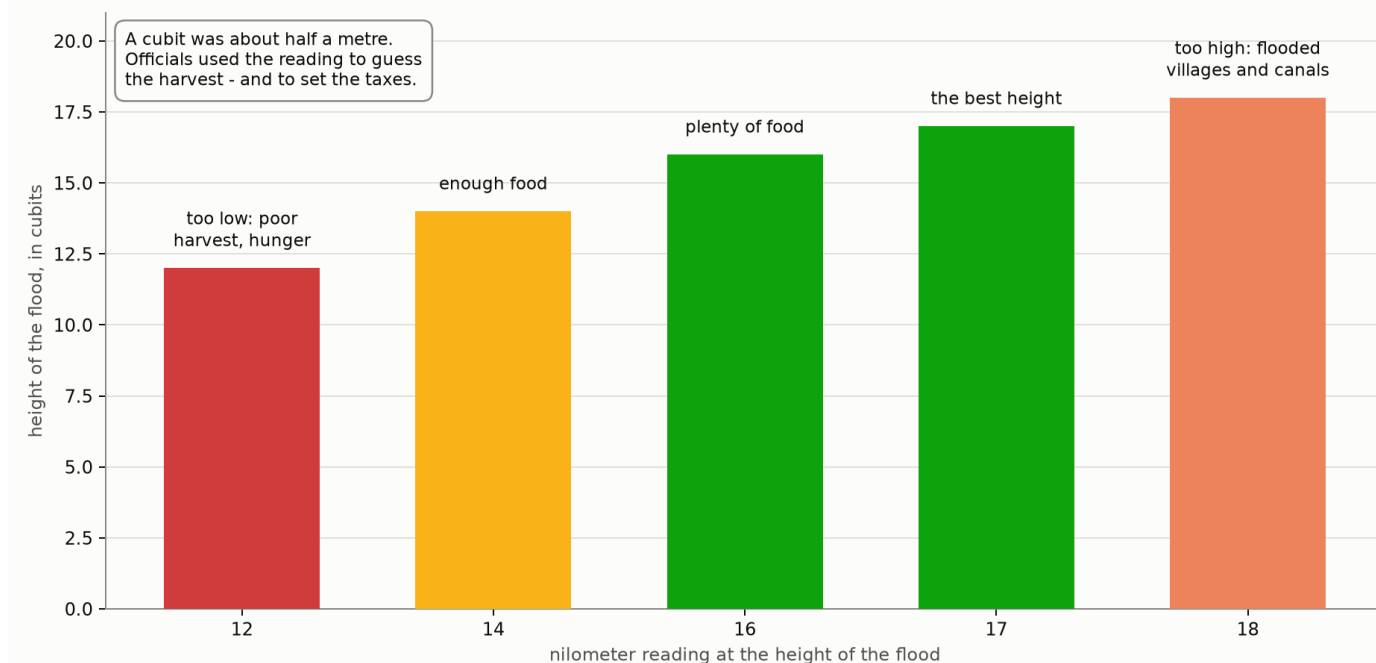
The god	Link to the river	Worshipped at
Hapi	god of the annual inundation itself - the flood was his gift. His priests watched the nilometer at Elephantine and held rituals for a steady, good flood.	Elephantine, at the First Cataract
Khnum	ram-headed god first linked with the cataracts. Egyptians believed he controlled how high the inundation rose, and that he shaped new children on a potter's wheel.	Elephantine, at the First Cataract
Satet	goddess who guarded Egypt's southern border and came to stand for the annual flood itself. She was one of three gods honoured together at Elephantine.	Elephantine, an island in the river at Aswan

When the river was treated as divine, caring for it - and thanking it - became part of religion.

Table of the three gods of the river — Hapi, Khnum and Satet — with each god's link to the river and their shared worship at Elephantine on the First Cataract

Priests at Elephantine watched the river rise on a **nilometer** — steps or a pillar marked in **cubits** (a cubit was about half a metre). The reading told officials what kind of harvest to expect, and helped them set the taxes. A flood that was too low meant hunger; a flood that was too high washed away villages and canals.

How high should the Nile rise? What nilometer readings told officials



Bar chart of nilometer readings in cubits and what each meant: 12 too low (poor harvest, hunger), 14 enough food, 16 plenty of food, 17 the best height, 18 too high (flooded villages and canals); a note says a cubit was about half a metre and officials used the reading to guess the harvest and set the taxes

The feelings behind this worship survive in a real source: the 'Hymn to the Nile' (also called the 'Hymn to Hapi'), a song made and sung by ancient Egyptians that gives thanks to the river for feeding the crops of Egypt. Part of it survives on a piece of limestone (an **ostrakon**) written in the quick, everyday form of Egyptian writing. It is kept in the Museo Egizio in Turin (item S. 6356).

SOURCE CARD: a song for the river

The 'Hymn to the Nile' (also called the 'Hymn to Hapi') is a song made and sung by the ancient Egyptians about the flooding of the Nile. It gives thanks to the river for feeding the crops of Egypt.

The song tells us that the Egyptians did not just use the river - they celebrated it. To them, a good flood was something to thank the gods for, not just good luck with the weather.

A real copy survives today: part of the hymn is written on a piece of limestone (an ostrakon) in the quick, everyday Egyptian writing. It is kept in the Museo Egizio, Turin (item S. 6356).

Reading songs and poems from the past is one way historians find out what people valued.

Source card describing the 'Hymn to the Nile': an ancient Egyptian song giving thanks to the river for feeding the crops, part of which survives on a limestone ostrakon in the everyday Egyptian script, kept in the Museo Egizio, Turin (item S. 6356)

Part 6 — Pulling it together

Putting it together: what the physical environment gave ancient Egypt

Feature of the environment	What it gave the Egyptians	How it helped society develop
The inundation (every year)	water, plus rich black silt spread over the fields	reliable crops; food for a growing population
The river itself	a smooth highway running the length of the country	trade, messages and armies moved quickly; one government could rule both ends
The wind and the current	easy travel in both directions	goods and ideas moved north and south all year
Papyrus reeds on the riverbanks	material for boats, mats, rope and paper	boats for the river; records for officials and scribes
The cataracts and forts such as Buhen	barriers and guarded gates on the southern border	long stretches of peace to build and farm
The deserts east and west	wide, dry barriers on both sides	protection from attack by land

Summary table matching each feature of the environment — the inundation that came each year, the river itself, the wind and the current, papyrus reeds, the cataracts and forts such as Buhen, and the deserts east and west — to what it gave the Egyptians and how it helped society develop

The physical environment did not *force* Egypt to develop the way it did — people made choices: they dug canals, raised walls, built forts and told stories about gods. But the environment made those choices possible: a reliable flood with rich silt, a two-way highway, wide desert shields, and river barriers in the south.

Worked examples

Example 1 — with help

Use Figure 4 (the cause chain) and Figure 9 (the nilometer chart).

Task: Explain how the inundation helped ancient Egyptian society develop. Use at least two cause-and-consequence steps, and one piece of evidence from the nilometer chart.

Work through these steps before writing:

1. Name the first thing the flood brought to the fields. (Two answers — water and what else?)
2. Follow the chain: what did reliable crops make possible beyond the farm? Name two kinds of people who could do other jobs because of the surplus.
3. Pick one nilometer reading and say what it meant for the harvest (for example, 16 cubits).
4. Now write 4–5 sentences. Start each cause sentence with “Because ...” or “This meant ...”, and check every consequence you name is on your chain.

Example 2 — with help

Source: Herodotus, a Greek writer, visiting Egypt around 440 BCE.

Around 440 BCE, a Greek writer named Herodotus visited Egypt. In his book, the *Histories*, he wrote that the land the Greeks reach by ship “is an acquired country, the gift of the river.”

Task: (a) In your own words, what does Herodotus mean by “the gift of the river”? (b) Herodotus was a foreign visitor. Give one reason his account is useful to historians, and one reason to check it against Egyptian sources such as the ‘Hymn to the Nile’.

Work through these steps before writing:

1. “Gift” means something given, not something earned or built. What is Herodotus saying the river gave?
2. Match his claim against one thing you learned in Part 1 or Part 2 of the teaching sequence.
3. For (b): think about *who* made each source. An outsider sees with fresh eyes — but an insider knows what the people themselves believed and valued.
4. Write 3–4 sentences for (a) and two short points for (b).

Practice tasks

Practice with help

1. Use the map (Figure 1). (a) Does the Nile flow north or south? (b) Name the sea it flows into. (c) Giza sits where the delta begins. Is Giza in Upper or Lower Egypt?
2. Figure 2 shows the three seasons. Put these in the order they happened: the harvest is gathered; the flood covers the fields; the water sinks back and farmers sow. Name the Egyptian season for each.
3. Figure 3 shows basin irrigation. (a) What do the earthen walls trap? (b) Name the two things the soil soaks up from the flood. (c) Why did farmers sow *after* the water drained on?
4. Use the table in Figure 8. Match each clue to a god: (a) “I guard the southern border.” (b) “The flood that comes every year is my gift.” (c) “People believed I decided how high the flood would rise.” (d) Where were all three honoured?
5. Use the nilometer chart (Figure 9). (a) Which reading was the best height? (b) What would a reading of 12 cubits mean for the people? (c) A cubit was about half a metre. About how many metres of flood is 16 cubits?
6. Figure 6 shows a boat heading south with its sail up. (a) What pushes the boat on this trip? (b) Why is no sail needed for the trip north?

Practice on your own

1. Most Egyptian farms sat close to the river. Explain why, using the words *silt* and *inundation* in your answer.
2. The great fort at Buhen was built at the Second Cataract — not down in the delta. Explain why that spot made sense.
3. A nilometer reading of 18 cubits might sound like good news: more water, more growing. Explain why it could be a disaster instead.
4. “Egypt was the gift of the river.” Do you agree with Herodotus? Write a short argument: two pieces of evidence that support him, and one point that shows the river alone was not enough (think about what the farmers *built*).

Source inquiry task

One question, two voices: “Why did Egypt get its harvests?”

- **Source A** — Herodotus, *Histories*, Book 2, written around 440 BCE by a Greek visitor: Egypt is “the gift of the river.”
- **Source B** — the ‘Hymn to the Nile’ (also called the ‘Hymn to Hapi’), a song made and sung by ancient Egyptians, giving thanks to the flood for feeding the crops; part survives on a limestone ostrakon in the everyday Egyptian script, Museo Egizio, Turin (item S. 6356).

Both are **primary sources** — things made by people of the ancient world itself. One is an outsider’s view; the other is an insider’s. A source’s **perspective** is the point of view of the person who made it — what they noticed, valued and believed.

1. Who made each source — an Egyptian, or a visitor? How might that change what each one notices?
2. What does each source say the harvest depends on?
3. Source B thanks gods; Source A credits the river. Suggest one reason the two voices differ (think about *why* a song of thanks and a visitor’s description are different kinds of writing).

4. What can a historian learn from a song of thanks, even though it is not a list of facts? Write one short paragraph (4–6 sentences) comparing the two sources, using the words *perspective* and *evidence*.

Answers

Practice with help

1.
 - (a) North. (b) The Mediterranean Sea. (c) Lower Egypt (the delta end).
2. The flood covers the fields (Akhet) → the water sinks back and farmers sow (Peret) → the harvest is gathered (Shemu).
3.
 - (a) Flood water. (b) Water and silt. (c) The soil was then wet and rich with new silt, and the fields were dry enough to work.
4.
 - (a) Satet. (b) Hapi. (c) Khnum. (d) Elephantine, at the First Cataract.
5.
 - (a) 17 cubits. (b) A poor harvest and hunger. (c) About 8 metres.
6.
 - (a) The north wind, pushing against the sail. (b) The current flows north, so the boat drifts with it (helped by oars).

Practice on your own — points a good answer makes

1. The inundation spread water and silt over the land nearest the river; further away, the desert sand grew almost nothing. So the good soil was the river-side soil.
2. The cataracts were the natural barrier at the southern border — the gate an attack from the south would have to pass. A fort at that gate watched and blocked the way in; the delta had no such choke point to guard.
3. At 18 cubits the flood was too high: it washed over villages and canals, destroying the very things the flood was meant to feed. Too much of a good thing was still a bad flood.
4. Support: the flood brought the water and silt that grew the crops (Figure 4), and the river carried the trade and taxes that held the kingdom together. Against: the surplus only became a society because people built basin walls, canals, granaries and forts — the environment made it possible, people made it happen.

Fully-worked solutions

Example 1 — model response

The inundation was the engine of ancient Egypt. Because the flood rose each year between about July and November, it brought water and rich black silt to the fields; this meant crops could be grown reliably on the same soil, year after year. Because the crops were reliable, there was a surplus — more food than the farming families needed — and this meant some people could take on specialist jobs, such as scribes, builders and priests, while rulers stored tax grain in granaries. The nilometer chart shows how closely everything hung on the flood: a reading of 16 cubits meant plenty of food, while 12 meant a poor harvest and hunger. So the inundation did not only water the fields; through the chain of causes and consequences, it made the surplus, the specialist jobs and the big shared works that mark a developed society.

Example 2 — model response

- (a) By “the gift of the river,” Herodotus means that Egypt’s farmland and its wealth were given by the Nile, not made by people alone: the river’s flood, returning each year, watered the fields and left the rich silt that grew the crops, so the country the Greeks visited existed because of what the river did. (b) His account is useful because he was an educated outsider who visited, looked carefully, and wrote down what he saw around 440 BCE — a near first-hand view that historians can check against Egyptian evidence. But he was still a foreigner, writing in Greek for Greeks, so his view should be checked against Egyptian sources: the ‘Hymn to the Nile’, made by Egyptians themselves, shows what the people of the river valley believed and valued — that the flood was something to thank the gods for, not just a fact of nature.

Source inquiry task — what a strong response looks like

A strong paragraph notices that Source A was made by a Greek visitor and Source B by Egyptians themselves, so the two sources carry different perspectives on the same river. It notices that both sources agree the harvest depended on the flood, while differing in voice: the hymn thanks gods such as Hapi because it is a song of worship, while Herodotus describes the river as the cause because he is explaining a country to readers far away. It concludes that a song of thanks is still useful evidence — not for the height of the flood, but for what the Egyptians believed and valued, which is exactly the kind of evidence the inquiry question asks about.

Sources for this section

All sources retrieved 24 August 2026. Curriculum codes in this section refer to the VCAA export as held in this build's authority file for Chapter 2.

- Wikipedia, “Nile” — length of the river, north-flowing current, the delta, the six cataracts and the river's role in transport and as a natural border.
- Wikipedia, “Cataracts of the Nile” — the cataracts as shallow, rocky stretches normally impassable by boats, and as a natural southern border.
- Wikipedia, “Egyptian calendar” — the three seasons Akhet, Peret and Shemu, of four months each.
- Wikipedia, “Agriculture in ancient Egypt” — basin irrigation; wheat, barley, flax and papyrus; the timing of flood, sowing and harvest.
- Wikipedia, “Buhen” — the Middle Kingdom fortress at the Second Cataract, built about 1860 BCE under Senusret III.
- Wikipedia, “Hapi (Nile god)”, “Khnum”, and the article on the goddess Satet — Hapi as god of the annual inundation, Khnum as ram-headed god of the cataracts who controlled the flood, Satet as guardian of the southern border; the three honoured at Elephantine.
- Wikipedia, “Nilometer” — measurement in cubits; the meanings of low and high readings; the reading used to set taxes.
- Wikipedia, “Ancient Egypt” — the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt about 3150 BCE under Menes, identified by most historians with Narmer.
- Wikipedia, “Old Kingdom of Egypt” — the Old Kingdom about 2686–2181 BCE; Khufu 2589–2566 BCE and the Great Pyramid at Giza.
- Wikipedia, “Hymn to the Nile” — the hymn as an ancient Egyptian song thanking the flood; part surviving on a limestone ostrakon in the everyday Egyptian script, Museo Egizio, Turin (S. 6356).
- Wikipedia, “Climate of Egypt” and “Etesian winds” — the north winds that blow for much of the year.
- Herodotus, *Histories*, Book 2 (c. 440 BCE), translation G. Rawlinson, via Wikisource — “the Egypt to which the Greeks go in their ships is an acquired country, the gift of the river.”

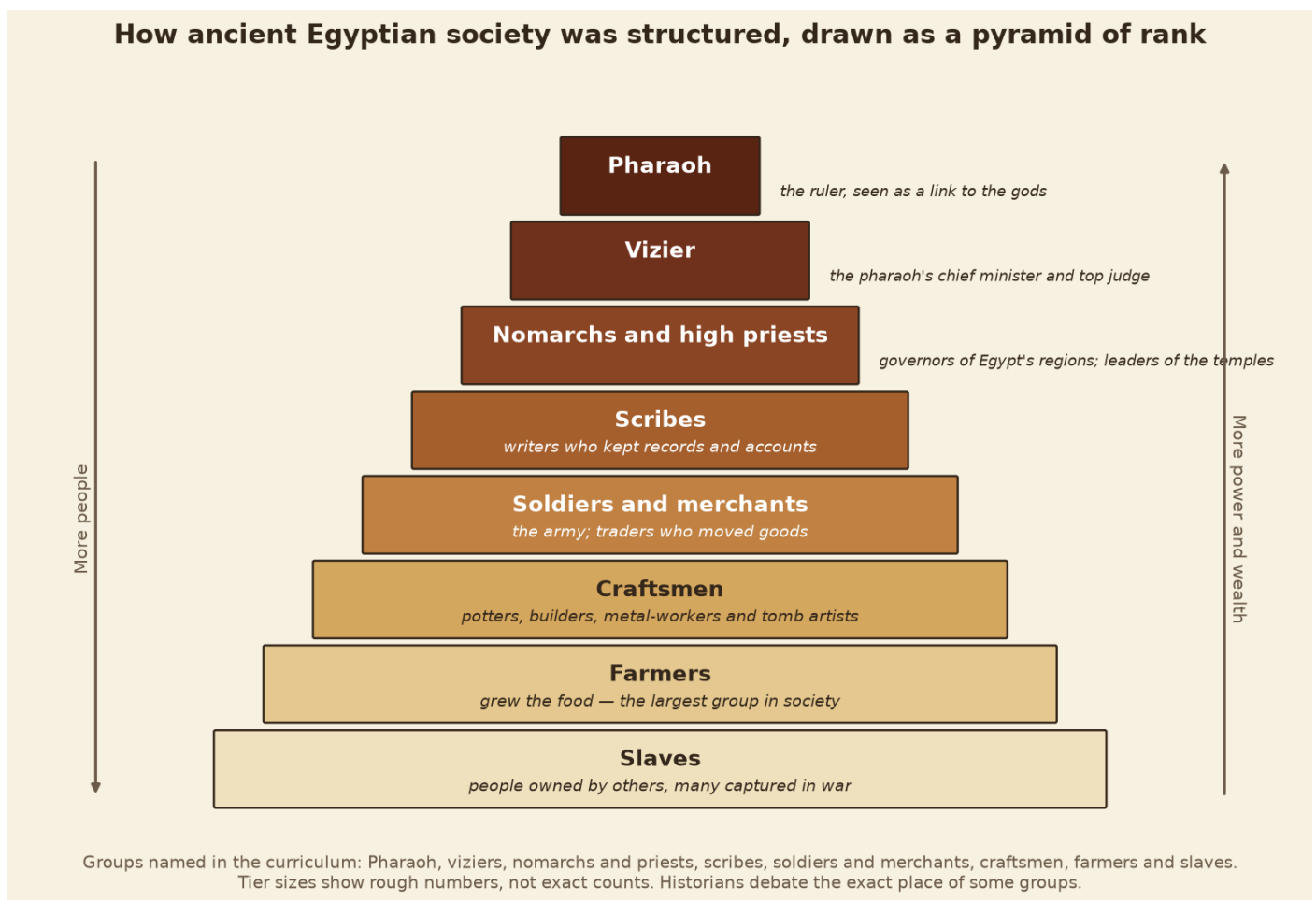
Ancient Egypt's society: how it worked and who mattered

Curriculum focus: content description VC2HH8K13. This section teaches the Egypt-labeled elaborations .E03 and .E04, and the topic-neutral elaboration .E02 taught through Egypt. The other elaboration ids on this code (.E01, .E05–.E09, for China, Greece, India and Rome) are linkage keys for the depth topics this book did not choose, and are not taught here.

Teaching sequence

What is a social structure?

Every society arranges its people into groups, and gives those groups different amounts of power, wealth and kinds of work. That arrangement is the **social structure**. Historians often draw it as a pyramid: a few people at the top with most of the power and wealth, and more and more people in each step down to the largest group at the bottom. The pyramid below shows the structure of ancient Egypt with the ten groups named in the curriculum. A **pharaoh** was the ruler of Egypt, seen as a link between the people and the gods.



A pyramid of eight tiers showing how ancient Egyptian society was structured, from Pharaoh at the top down through vizier, nomarchs and high priests, scribes, soldiers and merchants, craftsmen, farmers, to slaves at the base, with arrows showing more people towards the bottom and more power and wealth towards the top.

The tier sizes show rough numbers, not exact counts, and historians debate the exact place of some groups — soldiers and merchants, for example, do not sit in the same spot in every historian's drawing. What is not debated is the overall shape: a small ruling top, a thin middle of trained workers, and a very large base of people who grew the food.

The groups, from the top down

At the top, the pharaoh ruled in theory over all the land. Below the pharaoh stood the **vizier**, the pharaoh's chief minister and top judge, who ran the day-to-day running of the country. **Nomarchs** governed Egypt's regions, called nomes, for the pharaoh, and **priests** ran the temples and cared for the statues of the gods. The middle of the pyramid

held the **scribes**, trained writers who kept the records, accounts and laws, and the soldiers and **merchants** (traders who moved goods like grain, cloth and gold). The base held the **craftsmen** who made pots, tools, furniture and tombs, the **farmers** who grew the wheat and barley, and the **slaves**. The table below gives each group's main jobs and what it got back.

The groups of ancient Egypt: what they did and what they got

Group	Main jobs	What the group got back
Pharaoh	Ruled Egypt; led the army; kept order (maat) for the gods	All the land in theory belonged to the ruler
Vizier	Ran the day-to-day running of the country; top judge	High rank, gifts of land and gold from the pharaoh
Nomarchs	Governed one of Egypt's regions (a nome) for the pharaoh	Local power; fine tombs near their home region
High priests	Cared for the gods' statues and ran the temples	Some of the temple food and gifts as payment
Scribes	Wrote records, accounts, letters and laws in hieroglyphs and a quicker writing hand	No heavy body work; a respected, safe job
Soldiers	Guarded Egypt and fought its wars; kept order at home	Grain pay, gifts of land, and a share of war goods
Merchants	Traded grain, cloth, gold, wood and other goods	Profit from buying cheap and selling dear
Craftsmen	Made pots, tools, furniture, gold work, tombs and temples	Grain and goods as pay (e.g. the Deir el-Medina tomb workers)
Farmers	Grew wheat and barley; most of the people of Egypt	A share of the crop after taxes; safety if the Nile flooded well
Slaves	Worked in houses, workshops and some building jobs	Food and shelter; could sometimes earn their freedom

Rewards are drawn from tomb scenes, pay records (like the ostraca of Deir el-Medina) and texts such as the Installation of the Vizier.

A table of ten rows, one per group from Pharaoh down to slaves, with columns for the group, its main jobs, and what the group got back, such as grain pay for craftsmen and a share of the crop for farmers.

Most Egyptians were farmers. They grew the food for everyone else in the pyramid, and their year was shaped by the Nile flood that came each year, which Section 2A studies. When the flood covered the fields, farmers could be called on to work on big building jobs instead.

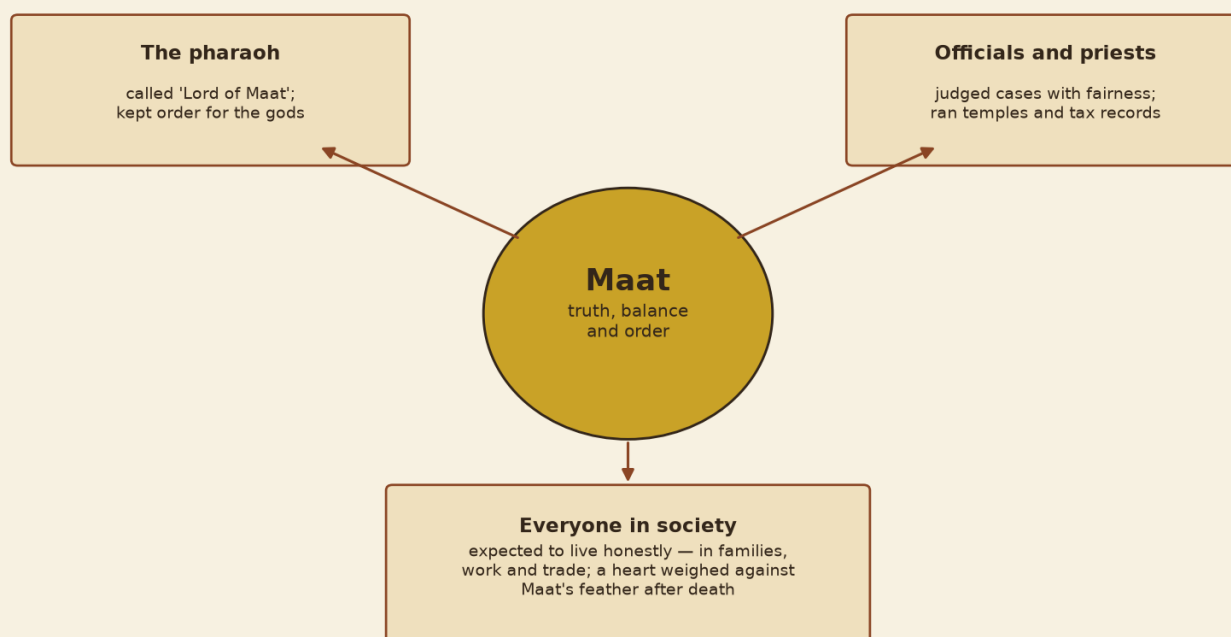
The word “slave”: a label historians weigh carefully

The bottom tier needs care. Some historians use the word **slave** for people in Egypt who were owned by others: records speak of war captives given to temples and households, and of people who could be handed over or bought. That side argues the word fits those people, and that Egypt, like other ancient societies, rested in part on forced work. Other historians answer that Egypt was not a “slave society” in the way Rome was: the big monuments were not built by owned slaves. The dig at the pyramid builders’ settlement at Giza, run by Mark Lehner’s team, found bakeries and food stores that gave food to thousands of workers, who were paid and cared for by the state — workers, not slaves. Much of the heavy work, that side adds, was done by farmers between floods, as a duty to the state, not by owned people. Both sides agree that some people in Egypt were owned and made to work; they disagree about how large that group was and whether it built the monuments. This section uses “slaves” for people who were owned, and it does not claim the pyramids were built by slaves.

Maat: the idea that held the order together

What made the pyramid feel right to the people inside it? The answer the Egyptians gave was **maat** — their idea of truth, balance and right order. The pharaoh was called the “Lord of Maat”: keeping maat was the chief duty of the ruler. The vizier and the judges were meant to apply maat in court, priests kept it in the temples, and ordinary people kept it by doing their own role well and treating others with fairness. Funerary texts — the texts for the dead that Section 2C studies — praise good people for having lived according to maat, which shows the expectation reached every tier. Maat is therefore not only a belief; it is the glue of the social structure, the reason each group’s place could be called fair.

Maat: the idea that held Egyptian society together



If maat was kept, the Nile flooded well and life went on. Breaking maat brought disorder. In tomb paintings and texts, kings are shown presenting a small figure of Maat to the gods as a sign they have kept order.

A concept map with maat, the idea of truth, balance and right order, at the centre, joined to the pharaoh as Lord of Maat, to officials and priests applying it, to everyone doing their role, and to the weighing of the heart against the feather of maat in funerary texts.

How do we know? The sources behind the picture

Everything in this section rests on sources made by the Egyptians themselves. A **primary source** is a source made in the time being studied; a **secondary source** is made later, by someone studying the past, like a historian today. Many Egyptian primary sources survive on stone, on papyrus (the paper-like sheet made from the reed), and on **ostraca**, pieces of stone or pottery used for writing. The table below lists the six primary sources this section is built on.

The sources this section is built on

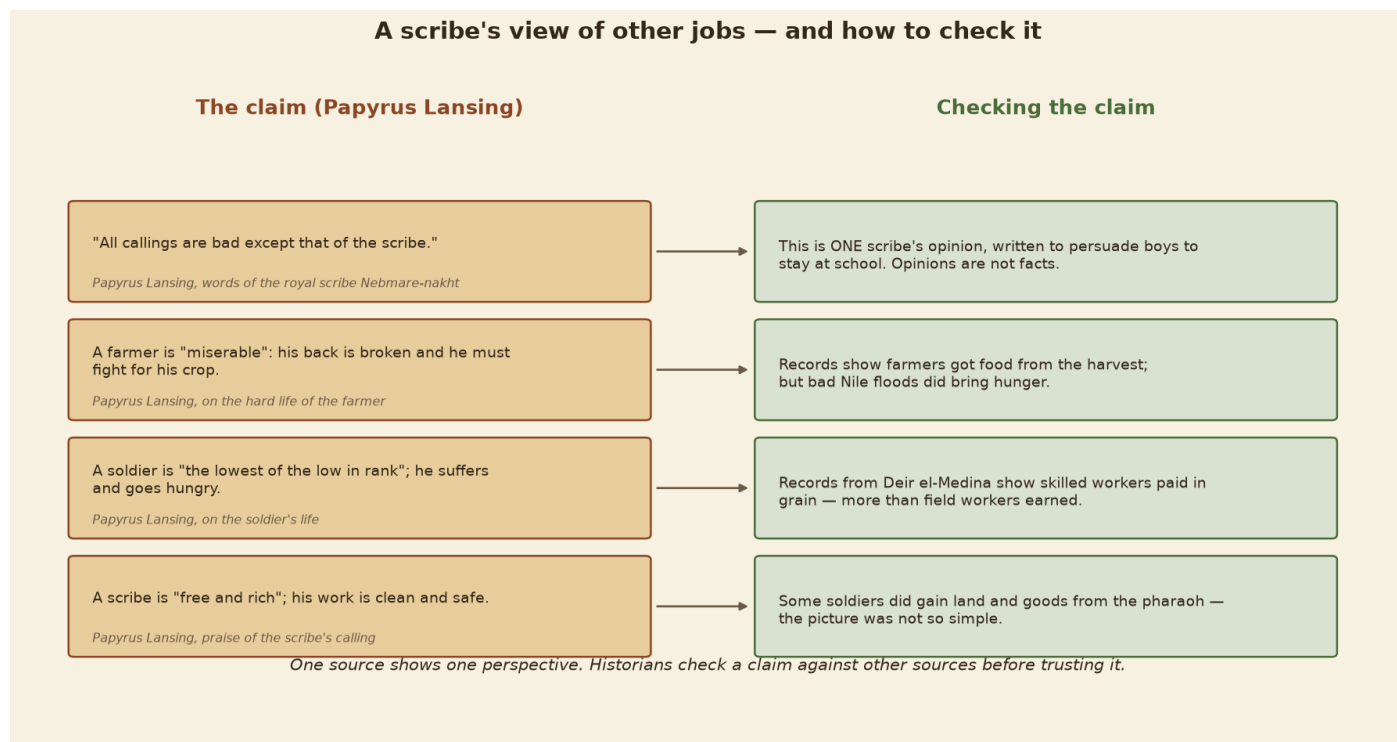
Source	Kind of source	What it shows about society
Tomb paintings of Nebamun (Thebes, about 1350 BCE)	Artwork (primary source)	An official's life and rank; his wife Hatshepsut shown beside him; women musicians at a feast
Wooden models from the tomb of Meketre (about 2000 BCE)	Object (primary source)	Work in a great household — grain grinding, food making, boats and cattle, women at work
Papyrus Lansing, British Museum EA 9994 (New Kingdom)	Text (primary source)	A scribe's proud view of his own job and his poor opinion of farming and soldiering
'Installation of the Vizier', in the tomb of Rekhmire, TT100 (about 1400 BCE)	Text (primary source)	The duties of the vizier: judging with fairness, reporting to the pharaoh, running officials
Ostraca from Deir el-Medina (about 1170 BCE)	Text (primary source)	Workers' grain pay, the strike ('We are hungry'), women's property and divorce
Wilbour Papyrus, Brooklyn Museum (about 1145 BCE)	Text (primary source)	A land survey: who held farm plots — including women, 11.1% of holders

A primary source is a source made in the time being studied. A secondary source is made later, by someone studying the past (like a historian today).

A table of six primary sources — the tomb paintings of Nebamun, the wooden models of Meketre, Papyrus Lansing, the Installation of the Vizier in the tomb of Rekhmire, the ostraca of Deir el-Medina, and the Wilbour Papyrus — with the kind of source each is and what it shows about society.

One scribe's opinion: the Papyrus Lansing

Sources have perspectives. The Papyrus Lansing is a school text in the voice of a royal scribe, Nebmare-nakht, telling his pupil that every job is awful except the scribe's. The soldier, he says, is "the lowest of the low in rank", and the text lists the farmer's hardships to put boys off the fields. That is useful evidence — but it is one scribe's proud view, written to persuade boys to stay in school, so historians check it against other sources before trusting it. The figure below pairs each of the scribe's claims with the checking evidence.



A figure of four paired boxes: on the left the claims Papyrus Lansing makes about the scribe, the farmer, the soldier and the craftsman, and on the right the checking evidence from other sources, showing where the scribe exaggerates and where he is backed up.

Women in ancient Egypt: rights and responsibilities

Elaboration .E03 asks what women of different classes could and could not do — in marriage, in family life, at work and in schooling. Egyptian women had real rights: a woman could own her share of a couple’s goods, could divorce, could hold property and run a business, and children could inherit from their mother. Responsibilities ran with the rights: a wife ran the home, and the title “Mistress of the House” was a mark of honour. Poorer women worked in the fields at harvest, ground grain, made cloth and brewed beer; some women held the title **chantress**, given to a woman who sang at temple festivals. Richer women had more choices, and a few elite women could read and write. Wisdom texts show the respect owed to mothers: the Instruction of Any tells a son, “Give back in abundance the bread your mother gave you. Support her as she supported you.” The table below sets out the rights and responsibilities by area of life, with the evidence.

Women in ancient Egypt: rights and responsibilities, with the evidence

Area of life	Rights (what a woman could do)	Responsibilities (what was expected)	Evidence
Marriage	A woman could own her share of the couple's goods and could divorce a husband who treated her badly	A wife ran the home; the title 'Mistress of the House' was a mark of honour	Marriage and divorce records on ostraca from Deir el-Medina
Family life	Mothers were honoured in wisdom texts; children could inherit from their mother	Raising children; keeping the household supplied with food and cloth	The Instruction of Any: 'Give back in abundance the bread your mother gave you'
Work	Could hold property and run businesses; some worked as musicians, cloth-makers and bakers	Grinding grain, weaving linen, brewing beer; singing at temple festivals (chantress)	Meketre's wooden models (about 2000 BCE); titles at Deir el-Medina
Education	Most girls did not go to school, but some elite women could read and write	Learning the skills of the home from mothers and older women	Peseshet, 'lady overseer of the female physicians' (Giza, Old Kingdom) shows women in skilled roles

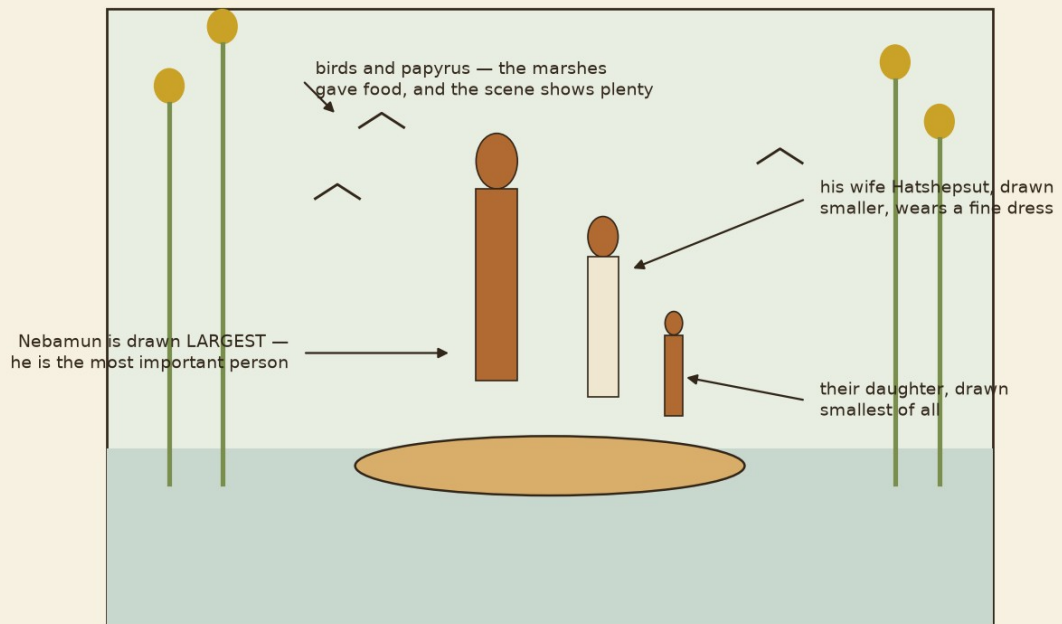
Rights were real but unequal: richer women had more choices than poorer women, as shown in artwork and funerary texts of different classes.

A table with rows for marriage, family life, work and schooling, and columns for the rights a woman could exercise, the responsibilities expected of her, and the evidence, showing that rights were real but unequal between richer and poorer women.

How artwork shows rank and roles: the Nebamun paintings

Artwork is the other great witness, and .E03 asks how women are *depicted* in it. Nebamun was a scribe and grain accountant at Thebes about 1350 BCE, and the paintings from his tomb-chapel, now in the British Museum, follow a simple rule: size shows rank. Nebamun is drawn largest; his wife Hatshepsut stands smaller beside him; their daughter is smallest of all. At a feast in the same chapel, women musicians play and sing. The paintings therefore show women in their roles — honoured wife and mother beside the man, musicians at the feast — exactly the depiction .E03 points to. But tomb art shows a family as it wished to be remembered, at its best, so historians read it beside the documents.

How an artwork shows rank: the Nebamun tomb-chapel painting, about 1350 BCE



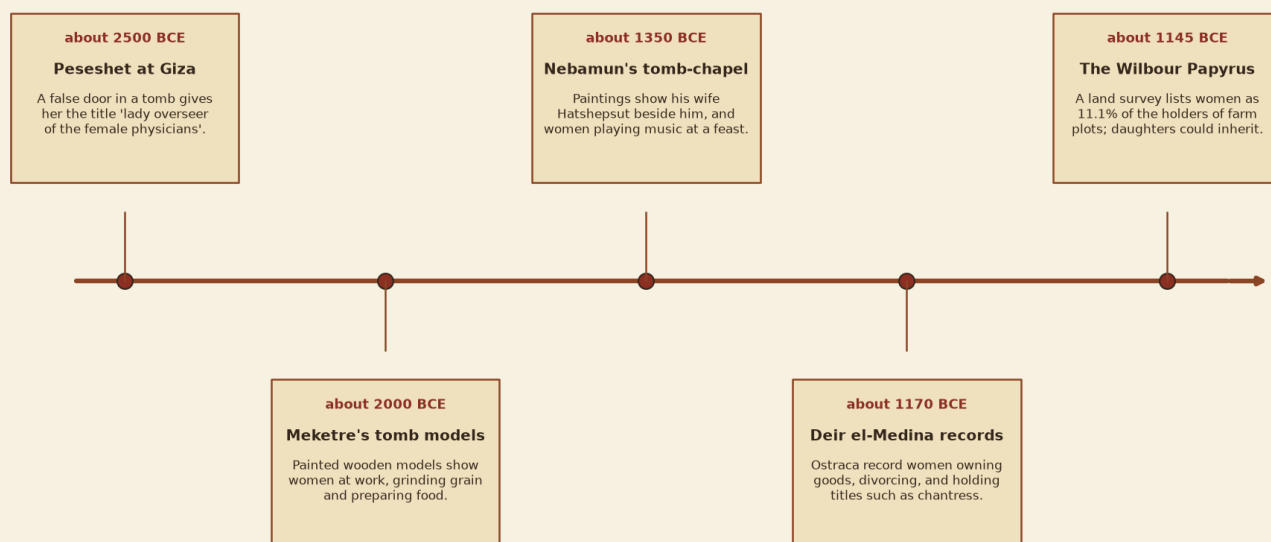
Original sketch of the scene's layout (British Museum, from Thebes). In Egyptian art, the size of a figure shows its importance. Nebamun was a scribe and grain accountant — important, but below the top officials.

A labelled sketch of the composition of a Nebamun tomb-chapel painting: Nebamun drawn largest, his wife Hatshepsut smaller beside him, and their daughter smallest, with labels explaining that size shows rank and that the scene shows the family as it wished to be remembered.

Women's lives over 1,400 years: continuity and change

Historians always look for continuity (what stayed the same) and change (what differed). The timeline below runs five dated sources for women's lives from about 2500 BCE to about 1145 BCE. At the start, a false door at Giza gives Peseshet the title "lady overseer of the female physicians" — whether she practised medicine herself is debated, but the title shows a woman overseeing skilled work in the Old Kingdom. At the end, the Wilbour Papyrus, a land survey, lists women as 11.1% of the holders of farm plots, and says sons or daughters could take over a plot when the holder died. In between, women grind grain in Meketre's tomb models, stand beside their husbands in tomb art, and at Deir el-Medina own goods, divorce, and hold titles like chantress. Across all those centuries the continuity is clear: Egyptian women could own, inherit and act in law. The changes are in the details — which jobs were open to them, and how rich or poor they were.

A timeline of evidence for women's lives in ancient Egypt



Each source shows women acting in real life — in skilled work, family, religion and property. Notice how far apart in time the sources are: society kept many features for centuries (continuity) while details changed.

A horizontal timeline from about 2500 BCE to about 1145 BCE with five boxes: Peseshet at Giza, Meketre's tomb models, Nebamun's tomb-chapel, the Deir el-Medina records, and the Wilbour Papyrus, each with a line of evidence for women's lives, and a note that the spread of dates shows continuity with change in the details.

Worked examples

Worked example 1 — with help: explaining the social structure with the grain strike

About 1170 BCE, in the reign of Ramesses III, the skilled tomb-workers of the village of Deir el-Medina stopped work because their monthly grain ration — their pay — was late. We use the strike to *explain* the social structure: where these workers sat in it, and how a group could influence the state.

Step	Working	Comment
1. Place the group	The tomb-workers were craftsmen: skilled, paid by the state in grain, above farmers and slaves in the pyramid.	The structure tells us where to look.
2. Name what went wrong	The grain pay was late; the workers said "We are hungry", and that eighteen days of the month had already passed.	Pay came as food, not coins, so a late ration meant hunger.
3. Describe the action	They laid down their tools, walked out of the royal tombs, and sat down outside the temples, refusing to move.	This is the first recorded strike we know of.
4. Follow the structure upwards	The vizier and other officials had to come, listen, and promise the pay.	Keeping order was the duty of the top tiers — maat in action.
5. State the influence	The state paid up, and when pay slipped again the workers walked out again and won again.	An ordinary group changed what the most powerful state of its day did.

Notice the shape of the explanation: structure first (step 1), then the event (steps 2–3), then the influence (steps 4–5). The strike is also a check on the word “slave”: these workers were paid, could protest, and had to be persuaded — they were not owned.

Worked example 2 — with help: a model reading of the Nebamun paintings

Now we read one artwork the way .E03 asks: what is shown, what the depiction says about rank and about women’s roles, what kind of source it is, and what checks it. This is a model you can copy the *shape* of for any Egyptian artwork.

Reading the Nebamun banquet painting (model source reading)

What is shown. A feast in the tomb-chapel of Nebamun, a scribe and grain accountant at Thebes, about 1350 BCE: the family together, and women musicians playing and singing.

The size rule. Nebamun is drawn largest, his wife Hatshepsut smaller beside him, their daughter smallest. Size shows rank, and the man heads the family picture.

Women’s roles. Hatshepsut is shown as the honoured wife and mother beside her husband — the “Mistress of the House” — while the musicians show one paid role open to women.

What kind of source it is. Tomb-chapel art is a primary source, but it shows the family at its best, as it wished to be remembered. It is evidence of roles and of what people valued, not a snapshot of an ordinary day.

Cross-check. The Wilbour Papyrus shows women holding farm plots in their own right, and Deir el-Medina’s ostraca show women owning goods and divorcing. The documents confirm that women’s real rights ran wider than the quiet wife in the painting.

Two things to copy. First, the reading moves from *what is shown* to *what it means* to *what checks it*. Second, it ends by testing the artwork against a different kind of source — artwork plus documents together give a stronger picture than either alone.

Practice questions

Practice with help

Q1. Using the social pyramid figure, name the largest group and the group at the top. Give one reason from the section why the top group’s place was tied to the gods.

Q2. Using the groups table, match each description to a group: (a) governed one region for the pharaoh; (b) kept the records, accounts and laws; (c) guarded Egypt and fought its wars; (d) made pots, tools, furniture and tombs.

Q3. Using the maat figure, who was called the “Lord of Maat”? Name two other groups who helped keep maat, and one thing each of them did.

Q4. Using the Papyrus Lansing figure, choose one claim the scribe makes about the soldier or the farmer. Is the claim a fact or an opinion? Name one other source from the sources table you could check it against.

Q5. Using the women’s rights table, give one right and one responsibility of women in marriage, and name the evidence the table gives for them.

Q6. Using the women’s evidence timeline, which source is the oldest and which the newest? What does the spread of dates show about continuity in women’s lives?

Practice on your own

Q7. Explain how ancient Egyptian society was structured, in your own words. Use at least five of the curriculum’s groups, and for two of them say what they got back for their work.

Q8. “Egyptian women had no rights and no influence.” Use the women’s rights table and at least two dated sources from the timeline to argue for or against this claim. Include how the lives of richer and poorer women differed.

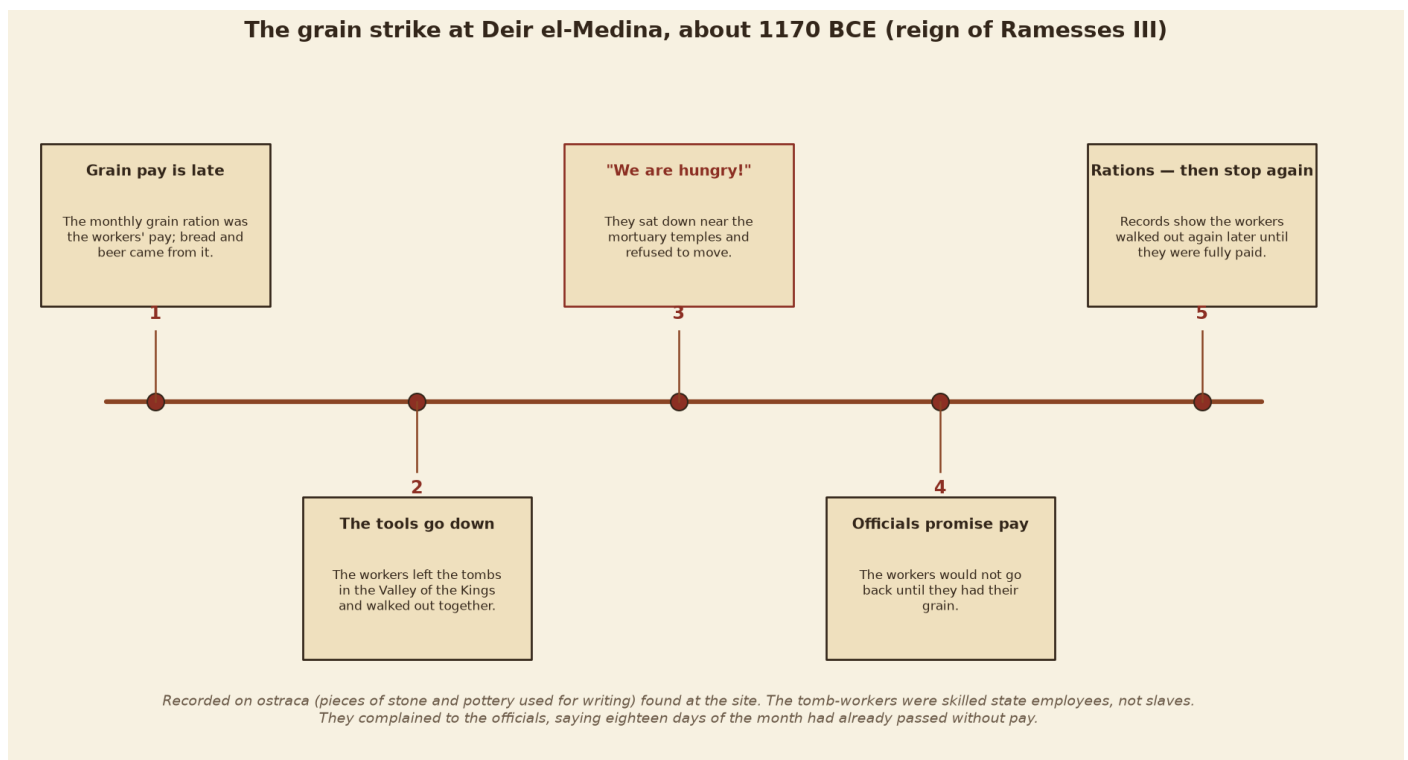
Q9. “Ancient Egypt was built by the work of slaves.” Give your judgement, using the evidence of the Giza workers’ settlement and one other source from this section. Then give the strongest argument for the other side.

Q10. The grain strike shows that ordinary workers could influence the state. How far do you agree? Use the strike and one other source from this section to support your answer.

Source-based inquiry task

Read Source A and look at Source B. Source A gives the workers’ own recorded words, from ostraca found at Deir el-Medina.

Source A — ostraca of the tomb-workers of Deir el-Medina, about 1170 BCE (reign of Ramesses III). The workers complained that they were hungry and thirsty: “We are hungry”, they said, and told the officials that “eighteen days have passed this month” without their grain.



A five-step timeline of the grain strike at Deir el-Medina about 1170 BCE: the grain pay is late; the workers lay down their tools; they sit down outside the temples crying we are hungry; officials promise pay; and rations are given, then the workers stop again until fully paid.

Inquiry. Use Sources A and B and the teaching sequence to answer:

1. What did the workers want, and what method did they use to get it?
2. A student says the strike proves the workers were slaves. Use the sources to agree or disagree with the student.
3. What does the strike show about the responsibilities of the vizier and the officials at the top of the pyramid?
4. Sort your answers above into two lists: what the sources actually say, and what you inferred (worked out) from them. Explain the difference in one sentence.

Answers

Q1. Largest group: the farmers. Top group: the pharaoh. The pharaoh was seen as a link between the people and the gods, and as the “Lord of Maat” whose duty it was to keep the right order, so the top place rested on the gods. **Q2.** (a) nomarchs; (b) scribes; (c) soldiers; (d) craftsmen. **Q3.** The pharaoh. Any two of: the vizier and judges, applying maat in court; priests, keeping it in the temples; ordinary people, doing their own role well and treating others with fairness. **Q4.** Example: “the soldier is the lowest of the low in rank” is an opinion — one scribe’s view, written to praise his own job. It can be checked against the groups table and the strike ostraca, which show soldiers and workers receiving grain pay and land, so not at the very bottom in real life. **Q5.** Right: a woman could own her share of the couple’s goods and could divorce a husband who treated her badly. Responsibility: a wife ran the home; “Mistress of the House” was a mark of honour. Evidence: marriage and divorce records on ostraca from Deir el-Medina. **Q6.** Oldest: Peseshet’s false door, about 2500 BCE. Newest: the Wilbour Papyrus, about 1145 BCE. The spread shows continuity — across all those centuries women could own, inherit and act in law — with change in the details, such as which jobs were open to them.

Q7. Indicative. A good answer walks the pyramid in order (pharaoh; vizier; nomarchs and priests; scribes; soldiers and merchants; craftsmen; farmers; slaves), ties the top to maat and the gods, and notes the base grew the food for everyone. Two groups need a “got back” line, e.g. craftsmen were paid in grain and goods (Deir el-Medina), farmers kept a share of the crop after taxes. **Q8. Indicative.** Against the claim: rights in marriage (owning goods, divorce), in work (property, business, titles like chantress), and in law (the Wilbour Papyrus lists women as 11.1% of plot-holders; daughters could inherit); Peseshet’s title shows a woman overseeing skilled work. A strong answer adds the class difference — richer women had more choices, most poorer women worked in the home and fields — and notes the artwork shows women honoured but quieter than the men, which the documents then correct. **Q9. Indicative.** Either side must use evidence. Against: the Giza workers’ settlement had bakeries and food stores for paid, cared-for workers; the Deir el-Medina workers were paid, could strike, and had to be persuaded — owned people are not paid rations. For (the strongest other side): records do speak of war captives given to temples and households and of people handed over or bought, so owned people existed and did some of the work; the argument is about how large that group was, not whether it existed. **Q10. Indicative.** A good answer agrees to a point: the strike worked because the state needed the tombs finished and the workers acted together, and the vizier had to come and pay — an ordinary group changed the state’s actions. “How far” needs the limit too: the workers won their grain, not a change to the structure, and the pyramid stayed as it was. **Inquiry. Indicative.** (1) They wanted their late grain pay; they walked out, sat down outside the temples, and refused to move. (2) Disagree: slaves are not paid a monthly ration, do not sit down and protest, and are not persuaded by officials; the sources show paid state workers. (3) Keeping order and seeing that people had food was the duty of the top tiers — the vizier and officials had to come and put things right (maat in action). (4) The key skill: “we are hungry” and “eighteen days” are what the sources say; “the workers had power because the state needed them” is something you worked out — a good answer can point to the chisel marks but must label the reasoning it adds.

Sources

All sources below were retrieved on 24 August 2026.

- **Tomb-chapel paintings of Nebamun** (British Museum, London; EA 37971 and related panels), Thebes, about 1350 BCE — via the Wikipedia article “Nebamun”.
- **Wooden tomb models of Meketre** (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and Egyptian Museum, Cairo), Thebes, about 2000 BCE — via the Wikipedia article “Meketre”.
- **Papyrus Lansing** (British Museum EA 9994), Thebes, New Kingdom — via the Wikipedia article “Papyrus Lansing”.
- **“Installation of the Vizier”**, tomb of Rekhmire (TT100), Thebes, about 1400 BCE — via the Wikipedia article “Rekhmire”.
- **Ostraca of Deir el-Medina**, including the strike records of the reign of Ramesses III, about 1170 BCE — via the Wikipedia article “Deir el-Medina”.
- **Wilbour Papyrus** (Brooklyn Museum, New York), year 4 of Ramesses V, about 1145 BCE — via the Wikipedia article “Wilbour Papyrus”.

- **False door naming Peseshet**, found in the mastaba of Akhethetep at Giza, Old Kingdom — via the Wikipedia article “Peseshet”.
- **Instruction of Any** (chief manuscript Papyrus Boulaq 4), composed in the 18th Dynasty — via the Wikipedia article “Instructions of Any”.
- **Maat** (the concept of right order) — via the Wikipedia article “Maat”.
- **Workers’ settlement at Giza** (Giza Plateau Mapping Project, Mark Lehner / AERA) — via the Wikipedia article “Mark Lehner”.

Ancient Egyptian beliefs: everyday life, death and burial

Teaching sequence

Ancient Egypt lasted for more than 3,000 years, from about 3150 BCE, when Upper and Lower Egypt were first united under one king, until Rome took control in 30 BCE. For this whole section, remember two habits of a historian: look for what **stayed the same** (continuity) and what **changed**, and always ask *how do we know?* — every claim here rests on real surviving objects, buildings and texts, listed under **Sources** at the end of the section.

Words you will meet (each is explained where it first appears): *pharaoh, dynasty, afterlife, mummification, natron, amulet, canopic jars, sarcophagus, tomb, grave goods, papyrus, hieroglyphs, scribe.*

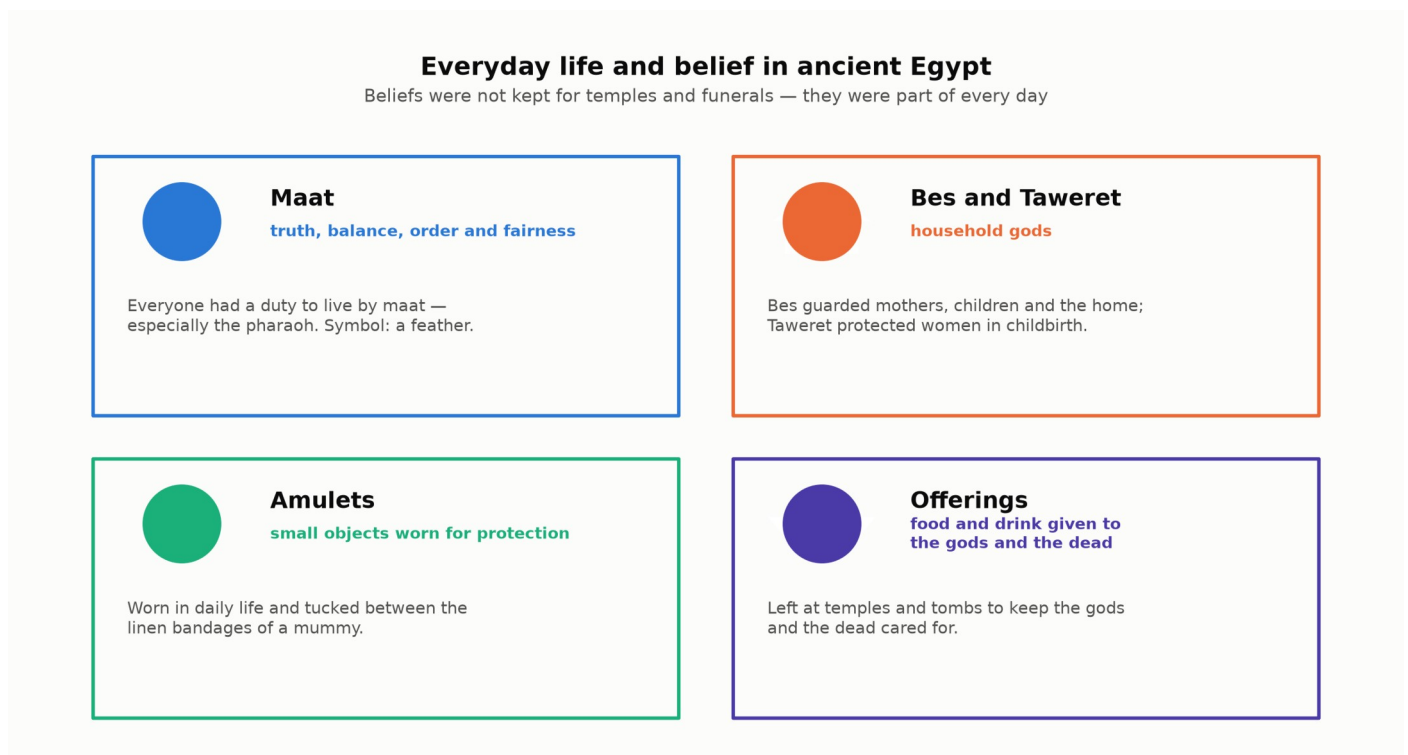
Stage 1 — Beliefs in everyday life

Egyptian beliefs were not kept for temples and funerals. They were part of every day.

Maat. The most important idea in Egyptian life was *maat* — truth, balance, order and fairness working together. Egyptians believed the world only worked as it should when maat was kept. Everyone had a duty to live by maat, from farmers to the pharaoh (the king of Egypt). The pharaoh had the biggest job of all: keeping maat in place for the whole land. Maat was also a goddess, shown with a single ostrich feather. You will meet that feather again at a very important moment — the judgement of the dead (Stage 2).

Gods at home. Most people could not go deep into the great temples, so they looked to household gods for help at home. Two of the best known are **Bes**, a dwarf god who guarded mothers, children and the home, and **Taweret**, a goddess with the body of a hippopotamus who protected women in childbirth. Families kept small images of them, wore **amulets** (small objects worn for protection), and painted protective signs in their houses.

Evidence. We know this from the things ordinary people left behind: amulets by the thousand, figures of Bes and Taweret found in houses, and notes on broken bits of pottery from the workers' village of Deir el-Medina (Stage 4), which record prayers and dreams.



Four panels showing everyday beliefs in ancient Egypt: the feather of Maat standing for order and fairness, the household gods Bes and Taweret guarding the home, a protective amulet, and offerings of food and drink

Figure 1 — Everyday life and belief. Each panel shows one belief and how it touched daily life.

Stage 2 — Beliefs about death and the afterlife

Egyptians believed death was **not the end**. They expected a second life after death — the **afterlife** — and they spent a great deal of time, work and money getting ready for it.

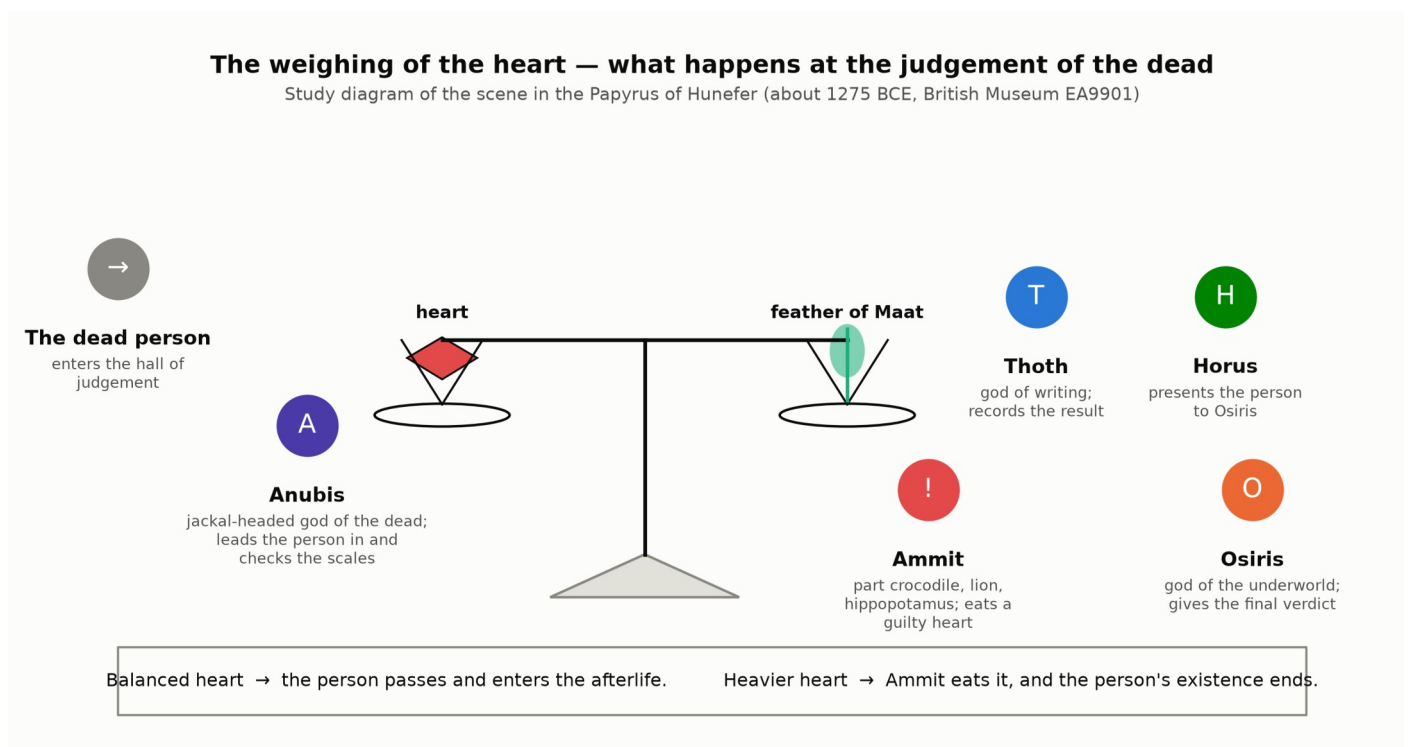
The journey to the afterlife was thought to be dangerous. The dead person had to travel through an underworld full of risks, and at the end of the journey they faced a **judgement**. The most famous scene in all Egyptian art shows what happened there.

The weighing of the heart. The dead person's heart was placed on one side of a set of scales. On the other side was the feather of Maat. If the heart balanced with the feather, the person had lived a good life and could enter the afterlife. If the heart was heavier, **Ammit** — a fearsome creature, part crocodile, part lion, part hippopotamus — swallowed it, and the person's existence ended for good.

The scene is crowded with gods, and each has a job:

- **Anubis**, the jackal-headed god of the dead, leads the person in and checks the scales.
- **Thoth**, the god of writing, records the result.
- **Osiris**, god of the underworld and judge of the dead, gives the final verdict.

This scene tells us something important about Egyptian **values**: reaching the afterlife was not automatic. It depended on how you had lived. Being rich would not tip the scales — a good heart would.



Labelled line diagram of the weighing of the heart scene from an ancient Egyptian papyrus: a balance scale with the heart on one side and the feather of Maat on the other, with Anubis, Thoth, Ammit, Horus and Osiris labelled

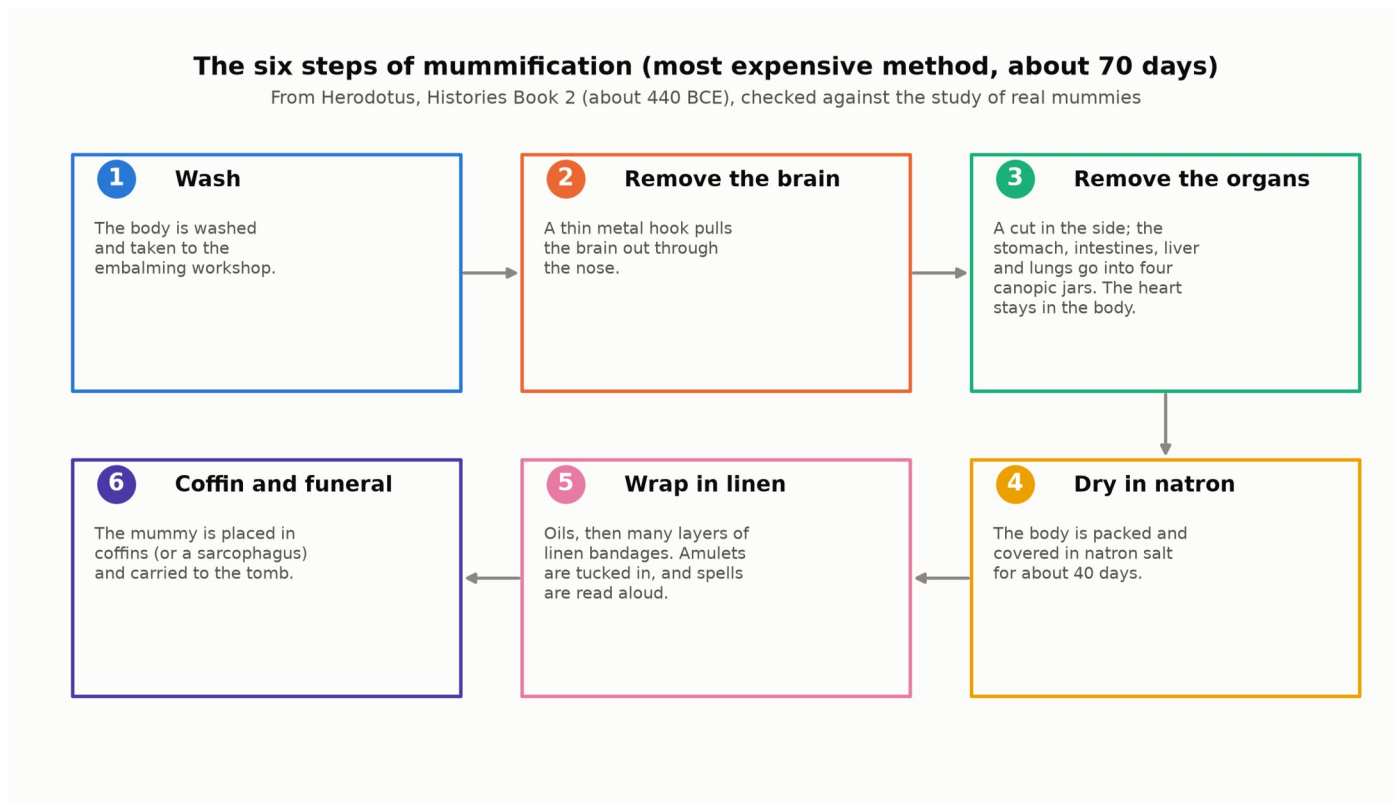
Figure 2 — The weighing of the heart, drawn from the famous scene in the Papyrus of Hunefer (about 1275 BCE, British Museum EA9901). The layout follows the Egyptian original.

Stage 3 — Mummification: looking after the body

Egyptians believed the dead person's spirit needed a body to return to. If the body rotted away, the afterlife was at risk. So they developed **mummification** — careful techniques for drying and wrapping a body so it would last. A full mummification took about 70 days.

The Greek writer **Herodotus** visited Egypt and described mummification in his book *Histories*, published around 440 BCE. He listed three methods, from the most expensive to the cheapest. Archaeologists have since checked his account against real mummies — much of what he wrote lines up with the evidence (see the inquiry task later).

The steps below are for the most expensive method, combining what Herodotus wrote with what modern studies of mummies show:



Six numbered cards showing the steps of ancient Egyptian mummification, from washing the body to placing it in the tomb

Figure 3 — The steps of mummification (most expensive method), from Herodotus, *Histories* Book 2 (about 440 BCE), checked against the study of real mummies.

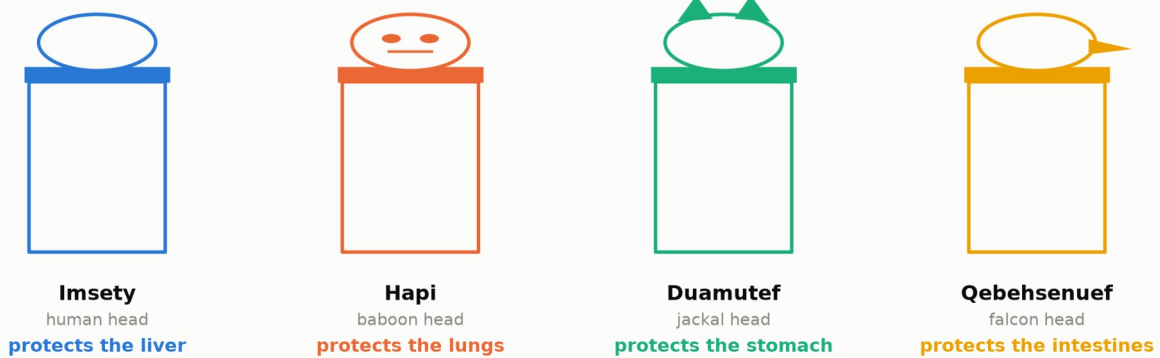
Step 1 — Wash. The body was washed and taken to a workshop.

Step 2 — Brain. The brain was pulled out through the nose with a thin metal hook. Egyptians did not think the brain mattered much.

Step 3 — Organs. A cut was made in the side of the body, and the stomach, intestines, liver and lungs were taken out. These organs were dried and stored in four **canopic jars** (one jar each), guarded by the four sons of the god Horus. The **heart stayed in the body** — it was the seat of the mind and feelings, and the person would need it for the weighing.

The four canopic jars: guardians of the organs

Four sons of the god Horus each guarded one organ. The heart stayed in the body for the weighing.



Four canopic jars drawn as simple jars with different head shapes on the lids, labelled with the guardian and the organ each jar held

Figure 4 — The four canopic jars and what each one held.

Step 4 — Dry. The body was packed and covered in **natron**, a natural salt gathered from dry lake beds in Egypt. Natron dried the body out so it could not rot. This drying took about 40 days.

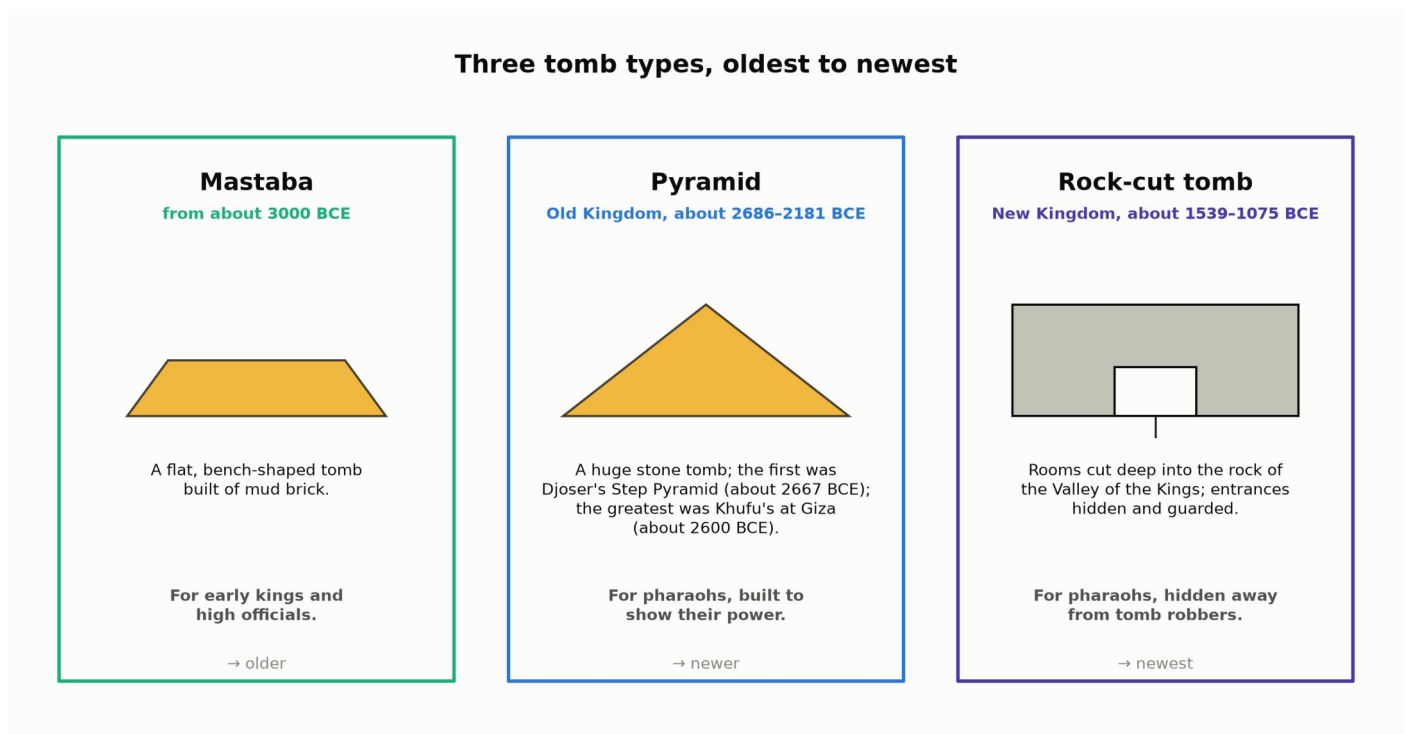
Step 5 — Wrap. The body was rubbed with oils and wrapped in many layers of linen bandages. Amulets were tucked between the layers for protection, and spells were read as the wrapping went on.

Step 6 — Rest. The wrapped body was placed in one or more coffins — sometimes a grand outer case called a **sarcophagus** — ready for the funeral and the journey to the tomb.

Stage 4 — Tombs: houses for eternity

A **tomb** is a burial place — a building or room built for the dead. Egyptian tombs were packed with **grave goods**: food, drink, clothing, furniture, tools, and small servant figures called **ushabtis**. Why so much stuff? Because Egyptians believed the dead would need, use and enjoy these things in the afterlife. Grave goods are therefore also evidence of belief: what people buried tells us what they expected.

Tomb design **changed a lot** over time. Three main types are shown below.



Three simple drawings side by side comparing a mastaba, a pyramid and a rock-cut tomb, each labelled with its period, who used it and why it was built that way

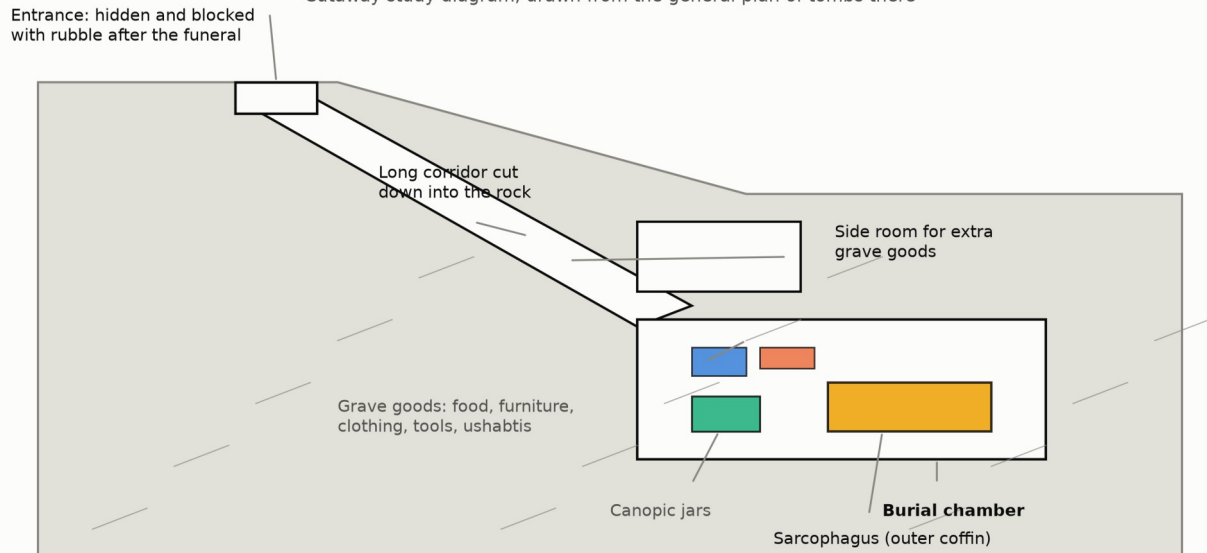
Figure 5 — Three tomb types, oldest to newest.

- **Mastabas** (from about 3000 BCE): flat, bench-shaped tombs of mud brick, used for kings and high officials in early times.
- **Pyramids**: the first was the **Step Pyramid of Djoser** at Saqqara, built about 2667–2648 BCE and designed by the architect **Imhotep**. It was the first pyramid and the first huge stone building in Egypt. The greatest pyramid was built for **Pharaoh Khufu** at **Giza** about 2600 BCE — the tallest human-made structure in the world for over 3,700 years. Pyramids belong to the **Old Kingdom** (about 2686–2181 BCE), the great age of pyramid building.
- **Rock-cut tombs** (about 1539–1075 BCE): in the **New Kingdom**, pharaohs stopped building pyramids. Instead they were buried in tombs cut deep into the rock of the **Valley of the Kings**, on the west bank of the Nile across from the city of Thebes (modern Luxor). About 65 tombs and chambers are known there.

Cause and consequence. Why the change? Pyramids were giant signs that said “a king and his treasure are buried here”, and tomb robbers raided them for thousands of years. Hidden, guarded rock-cut tombs were harder to find and rob. The change in tomb design was a direct response to the crime of tomb robbery.

Inside a New Kingdom rock-cut tomb (Valley of the Kings)

Cutaway study diagram, drawn from the general plan of tombs there



Why hidden? Pyramids marked where treasure lay. Hidden tombs were harder to rob.

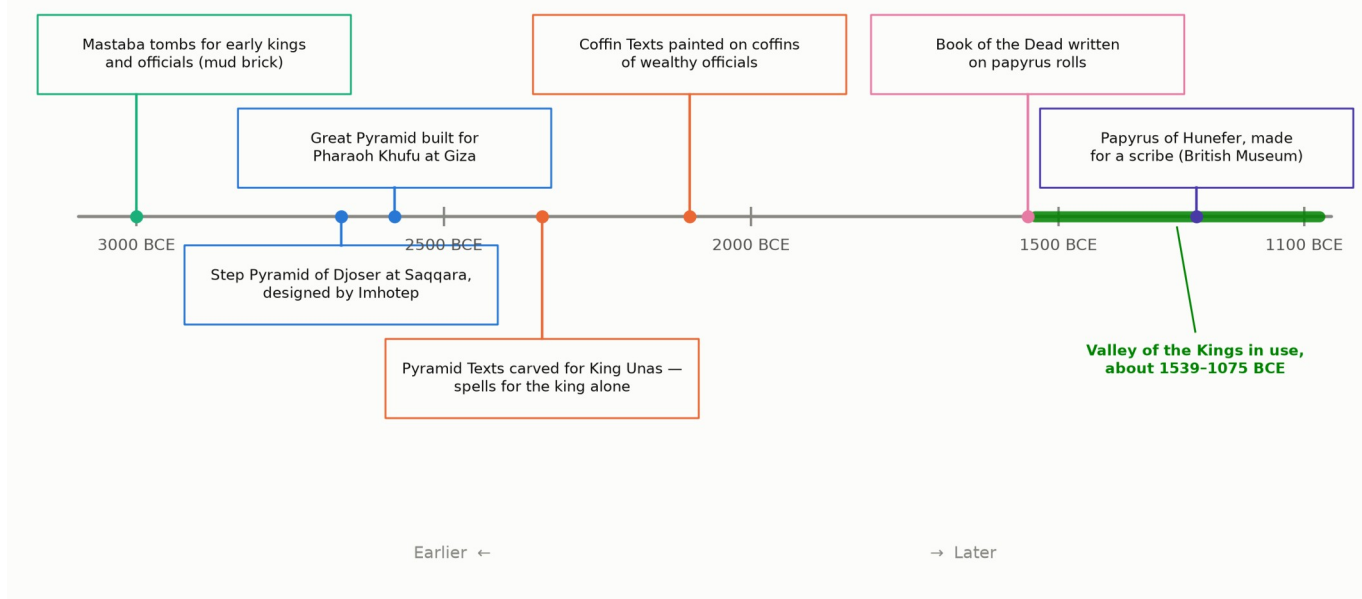
Cutaway diagram of a New Kingdom rock-cut tomb showing the entrance, a long corridor, a side room and the burial chamber with the sarcophagus, canopic jars and grave goods

Figure 6 — Inside a New Kingdom rock-cut tomb (drawn from the general plan of tombs in the Valley of the Kings).

The tomb that survived. Robbers found almost every royal tomb — but not all of them. On 4 November 1922, the British archaeologist **Howard Carter** and his team, paid for by Lord Carnarvon, found the tomb of the boy pharaoh **Tutankhamun** (KV62) in the Valley of the Kings. Most of its grave goods were still intact: 5,398 objects, from golden coffins to everyday things like chairs, games and food. It took ten seasons of careful work, until 1932, to record and remove them. Tutankhamun's tomb is the best single window we have into what a royal burial held.

The workers. The tombs did not build themselves. The people who cut, painted and decorated the royal tombs lived in a purpose-built village called **Deir el-Medina**, close to the Valley of the Kings, during the New Kingdom (about 1550–1080 BCE). The village has given historians letters, legal records, prayers and notes on broken pottery, so we know the workers' everyday beliefs as well as their tombs.

Change in Egyptian burial customs, about 3000 BCE to about 1200 BCE



Horizontal timeline from about 3000 BCE to about 1200 BCE with seven dated events marking changes in Egyptian burial customs

Figure 7 — A timeline of change: burial customs, about 3000 BCE to about 1200 BCE.

Stage 5 — Spells for the dead: from pyramid walls to papyrus rolls

Knowing what to say and do in the dangerous underworld was a problem — so Egyptians wrote guides. These spell texts are among the most important sources we have, and their history is a clear story of **change within continuity**.

Pyramid Texts (from about 2400–2300 BCE). The oldest Egyptian religious writings we know. They were carved on the walls inside royal pyramids at Saqqara — the oldest complete set is in the pyramid of King Unas (who ruled about 2353–2323 BCE). There were no pictures, and the spells were **for the king alone**.

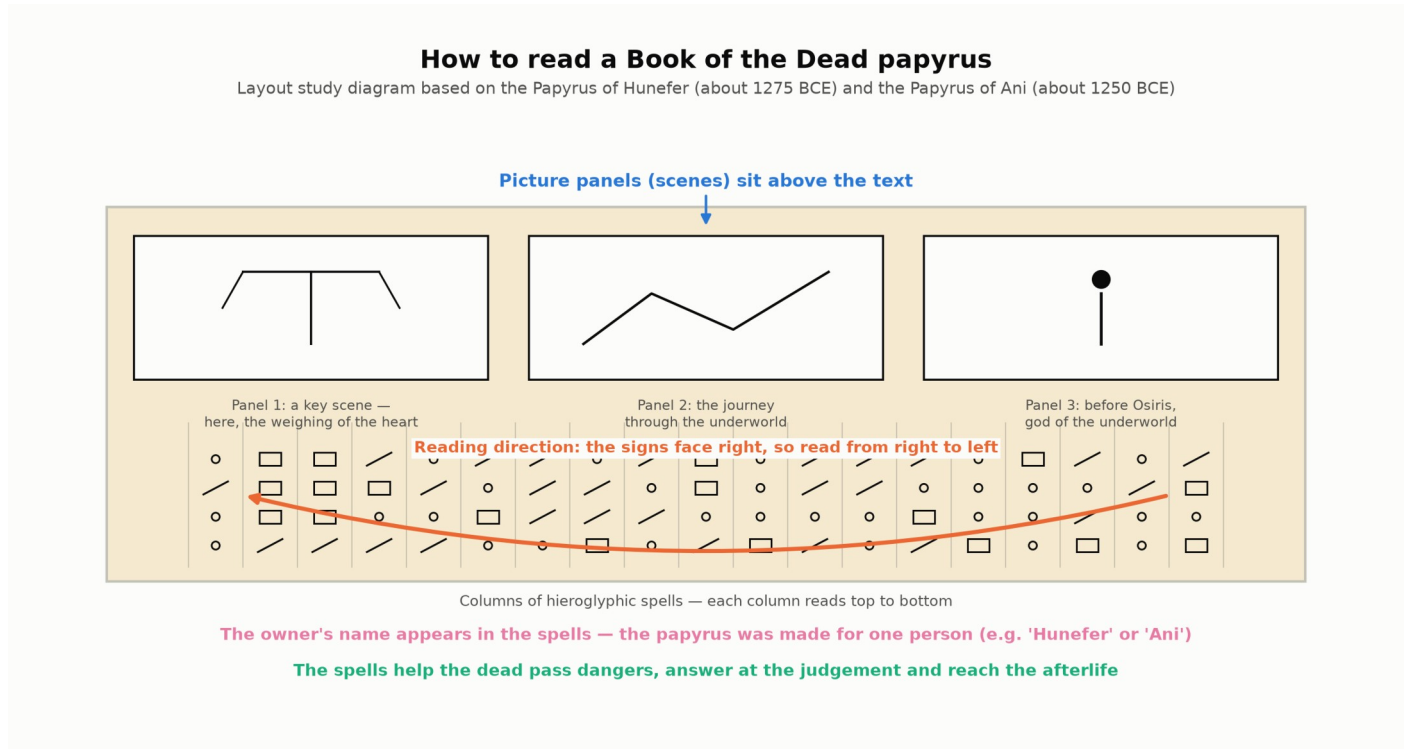
Coffin Texts (from about 2100 BCE). In the **Middle Kingdom** (about 2040–1782 BCE), spells moved from pyramid walls onto the **coffins** of high officials and other wealthy people. The afterlife was no longer reserved for the king. The texts now focused on the dangers of the underworld and on judgement — the weighing of the heart grows in importance in these centuries, and Osiris became the most important god of the dead.

The Book of the Dead (from about 1550 BCE). In the New Kingdom, spells were written on rolls of **papyrus** — a writing material made from a reed that grew beside the Nile — and placed in the coffin or burial chamber. Copies were bought by officials, scribes and priests who could afford them. The name “Book of the Dead” is a modern one, given by scholars; it is not a single book but a collection of spells, chosen and paid for by each buyer.

Reading the pictures in the Book of the Dead. Egyptian writing, **hieroglyphs**, uses pictures and signs for words and sounds. A Book of the Dead papyrus is not read like a modern book. Here is how to analyse one, using two famous real examples, both in the British Museum:

- the **Papyrus of Hunefer** (about 1275 BCE, EA9901), made for Hunefer, a scribe and official who served Pharaoh Seti I, and

- the **Papyrus of Ani** (about 1250 BCE, EA10470), made for Ani, a scribe from Thebes — about 24 metres long.



Stylised diagram of an ancient Egyptian papyrus roll laid out flat, labelled to show the picture panel, columns of hieroglyphic spells, the owner's name and reading direction

Figure 8 — How to read a Book of the Dead papyrus (layout based on the Papyri of Hunefer and Ani). This is a study drawing of the layout, not a copy of the artwork.

Ask these questions of any such source (you will practise this in Sections 5C–5D):

- Layout.** Picture panels sit above columns of text. The pictures show key scenes (like the weighing of the heart); the hieroglyphs are the spells themselves.
- Direction.** Hieroglyphs can face left or right; you read towards the direction the signs face.
- Owner.** The owner's name appears in the text — it was made for one person.
- Content.** The spells help the dead pass dangers, answer at the judgement, and reach the afterlife. The weighing of the heart (Stage 2) is the scene most often shown.
- Beliefs.** Every feature is evidence: pictures, spells and grave goods together show what Egyptians believed about death.

Stage 6 — Continuity, change and a contested question

Egypt's death customs: what changed, what stayed the same

Across more than 2,000 years (about 2400 BCE to about 1200 BCE)

WHAT CHANGED	WHAT STAYED THE SAME
Who could have spell texts: king alone (Pyramid Texts), then wealthy officials (Coffin Texts), then anyone who could pay (Book of the Dead)	Belief in an afterlife and a dangerous journey to reach it
Where spells were written: pyramid walls, then coffins, then papyrus rolls	Judgement by the weighing of the heart against Maat's feather
Tomb design: mastabas, then pyramids, then hidden rock-cut tombs in the Valley of the Kings	Mummification — keeping the body safe for the dead person's spirit
Why tombs changed: robbers raided the pyramids, so New Kingdom kings hid their tombs	Grave goods and food packed for the journey
	The duty to live by maat

Two-column chart listing what changed and what stayed the same in Egyptian beliefs and practices about death

Figure 9 — Change and continuity in Egypt's death customs, at a glance.

What changed over about 2,000 years of this story:

- **Who could have spell texts:** king alone (Pyramid Texts) → wealthy officials (Coffin Texts) → anyone who could pay (Book of the Dead).
- **Where spells were written:** pyramid walls → coffins → papyrus rolls.
- **Tomb design:** mastabas → pyramids → hidden rock-cut tombs (because of robbery).

What stayed the same throughout:

- the belief in an afterlife and a dangerous journey to reach it;
- judgement by the weighing of the heart against Maat's feather;
- mummification — keeping the body safe for the spirit;
- grave goods and food for the journey;
- the duty to live by maat.

A contested question. Some historians describe the spread of spell texts as the afterlife “opening up”: over time, more and more people could hope for it. Other historians point out that every step of this story cost money — scribes, papyrus, coffins, tombs and mummification were all paid work, and the poorest Egyptians were still buried simply, with little or no equipment for the afterlife.

Both positions are strong, and both rest on the same evidence:

- **For “opening up”:** the texts themselves move from one king, to officials, to scribes like Ani and Hunefer, who were not royalty. The historian John Taylor traces this spread in his study of that text (British Museum, 2010).
- **For “only if you could pay”:** every surviving copy of the text belonged to someone with money or status. No copy has been found in a poor burial, and poor burials were the most common kind.

When you meet this question in the tasks below, you are marked on the **quality of your reasoning** — terms defined, evidence used, both sides stated honestly — not on which side you land on.

Worked examples

Worked example 1 — with help: analysing a primary source

Task. The picture panel below is from the Papyrus of Hunefer (about 1275 BCE), a Book of the Dead papyrus made for a scribe named Hunefer. Analyse what it shows about Egyptian beliefs about death. Use the table: *what I can see* → *what it suggests* → *my reason*.

What I can see (evidence)	What it suggests about Egyptian beliefs	My reason
A balance scale. On one side is a heart; on the other side is a feather.	Egyptians believed the dead were judged by how they had lived.	The heart stood for the person's record in life; the feather of Maat stood for truth and order. A good life was expected to "balance".
A jackal-headed god, Anubis, crouches by the scale and checks it.	The judgement was believed to be real, careful and fair.	A god oversees the weighing — this was not a human opinion but a divine test.
A god with the head of an ibis, Thoth, stands with writing tools.	The result was believed to be recorded and could not be argued with.	Writing was trusted to fix the truth — exactly as scribes like Hunefer did in real life.
Ammit, part crocodile, part lion, part hippopotamus, waits beside the scale.	Failing the judgement meant total destruction, not a second chance.	The dead would lose the afterlife completely if the heart outweighed the feather.
Osiris, god of the underworld, is seated at the end of the scene.	The final verdict belonged to the god of the dead himself.	Osiris receiving the person shows success means entering the afterlife.

What makes this answer strong? Every claim starts from something visible, every belief is tied to a piece of evidence, and no step just says "they believed it" without saying *why* the source shows that.

Worked example 2 — with help: explaining continuity and change

Task. Explain how Egyptian funerary texts changed over time, and what stayed the same. Use dates, places and source names.

Model paragraph (point → evidence → explanation → link):

Between about 2400 and about 1250 BCE, the way Egyptians wrote spells for the dead changed a lot, but the beliefs behind the spells stayed very stable. At first, spells existed only as **Pyramid Texts**, carved inside royal pyramids at Saqqara — the oldest complete set belongs to King Unas (about 2353–2323 BCE) and was reserved for the king. From about 2100 BCE, in the Middle Kingdom, similar spells appeared as **Coffin Texts**, painted on the coffins of wealthy officials, and from about 1550 BCE, in the New Kingdom, they were written on papyrus rolls as the **Book of the Dead**, bought by officials and scribes such as Hunefer (about 1275 BCE). **The cause of this change** was in part social — more people wanted, and could pay for, help in the afterlife — and the **consequence** was that texts moved from walls, to coffins, to portable rolls. **Yet the core beliefs show continuity:** the dangerous journey, the judgement by the weighing of the heart, and the hope of a blessed afterlife appear in texts 1,500 years apart.

Why this works: it gives a clear point, uses dated and named evidence, names a cause and a consequence, and separates change from continuity.

Practice questions

Practice with help

Q1. Match each term to its meaning. Draw lines or write the letter.

Term	Meaning
1. pharaoh	a. a small object worn for protection
2. mummification	b. the king of ancient Egypt
3. amulet	c. writing spells for the dead on papyrus rolls
4. Book of the Dead	d. drying and wrapping a body so it lasts after death

Q2. Put the six steps of mummification (Figure 3) in the correct order, 1–6:

- () Wrap the body in linen bandages with amulets.
- () Wash the body.
- () Dry the body in natron.
- () Remove the brain through the nose.
- () Place the body in its coffin(s) or sarcophagus.
- () Remove the organs and store them in canopic jars.

Q3. Copy and complete the table (use Figure 4 to help):

Guardian (son of Horus)	Head shape	Organ protected
Imsety	human	?
?	baboon	lungs
Duamutef	?	stomach
Qebehsenuef	falcon	?

Q4. Using Figure 7 (the timeline), write down:

- (a) one change in **tomb design**, with a date; and
- (b) one change in **who could have spell texts**, with a date.

Q5. True or false? Correct the false statements.

- (a) The heart was removed and put in a canopic jar.
- (b) The feather on the scales belongs to the goddess Maat.
- (c) Pyramids were built in the New Kingdom.
- (d) The tomb of Tutankhamun was found on 4 November 1922.
- (e) The Pyramid Texts were available to anyone who could pay.

Q6. Complete the sentences using the word bank: **natron · grave goods · ushabtis · afterlife · sarcophagus · papyrus.**

- (a) Objects buried with the dead for use in the next world are called _____.
- (b) The natural salt used to dry the body was _____.
- (c) Small servant figures placed in tombs are called _____.
- (d) The life believed to follow death is the _____.
- (e) A grand outer coffin is a _____.
- (f) The Book of the Dead was written on rolls of _____.

Practice on your own

Q7. “Mummification is evidence of what Egyptians believed.” Explain what the steps of mummification (Stage 3) tell us about Egyptian beliefs about death. Use at least two steps and say what each one suggests. (4 marks)

Q8. Compare two of the three tomb types in Figure 5. For each, state who it was built for, roughly when it was used, and one reason for its design. Then explain why tomb design changed from pyramids to hidden rock-cut tombs. (6 marks)

Q9. “The spread of funerary texts — Pyramid Texts, Coffin Texts, Book of the Dead — shows that the afterlife became available to more and more people.” State the strongest case **for** this claim and the strongest case **against** it, using evidence from Stage 6. Then give your own reasoned judgement. (8 marks)

Q10. Write one paragraph identifying one **continuity** and one **change** in Egyptian beliefs and practices about death between about 2600 BCE and about 1250 BCE. Use at least two dated, named pieces of evidence. (6 marks)

Source-based inquiry task — How accurate was Herodotus?

Herodotus was a Greek writer who visited Egypt. Around 440 BCE he published his *Histories*, which include a famous description of mummification (Book 2). He is a **primary source** for how a Greek visitor saw Egyptian customs in his own lifetime — but he was writing about beliefs and practices that were already ancient, and from an outsider’s point of view. (You will weigh source value like this in Sections 5C–5D.)

Sorting our sources: primary and secondary

Primary sources were made in the time being studied. Secondary sources were made later, by people studying that time.

PRIMARY — made in ancient times

Papyrus of Ani (about 1250 BCE)

Papyrus of Hunefer (about 1275 BCE)

Herodotus, *Histories* (about 440 BCE)

Tutankhamun's tomb and its 5,398 objects (found 1922)

Mummies, coffins, canopic jars and amulets

Tombs, pyramids and tomb paintings

Notes on broken pottery from Deir el-Medina

SECONDARY — made later by historians

John Taylor's study of the Book of the Dead (2010)

Howard Carter's published records of the excavation (from 1922)

Modern museum displays and catalogues

Archaeologists' reports on mummies and tombs

This section of your workbook

Ask of any source: who made it, when, and how close were they to the event? (Section 5D)

Two-column chart sorting the sources used in this section: on the left, primary sources made in ancient times (the Papyri of Ani and Hunefer, Herodotus's Histories, Tutankhamun's tomb and its objects, mummies, coffins, canopic jars, amulets, tombs, pyramids, tomb paintings and pottery notes from Deir el-Medina); on the right, secondary sources made later (John Taylor's 2010 study, Howard Carter's published dig records, museum displays, archaeologists' reports and this workbook)

Figure 10 — Primary or secondary? The sources this section uses, sorted. Sort them yourself first, then check against the chart.

What Herodotus wrote (shortened): the embalmers draw out the brain through the nostrils with an iron hook; they make a cut along the side of the body and remove the contents of the belly; the body is packed in natron, a natural salt,

to dry it; after the drying, the body is washed, wrapped in linen bandages, and coated with a gum; the whole process did not pass 70 days. He also says there were cheaper methods for those with less money.

What the study of mummies shows: real mummies confirm brain removal through the nose, cuts in the side of the body, drying with natron, and many layers of linen; scans and unwrappings also show amulets between the bandages — something Herodotus does not mention.

- (a) List two things Herodotus wrote that match the physical evidence from mummies.
 - (b) List one thing about mummification that the mummies show but Herodotus does not mention.
 - (c) Herodotus says the brain was pulled out “with an iron hook”, but some studied skulls show marks more like a thin rod. Does this make Herodotus useless as a source? Explain why or why not.
 - (d) Give one reason why Herodotus’s account might be reliable, and one reason why it might contain mistakes.
 - (e) Judgement: is Herodotus’s account valuable evidence for mummification? Answer in two or three sentences, using the idea of **value** (what the source is useful for) rather than just “right” or “wrong”.
-

Sample answers

Q1. 1–b (pharaoh = king of ancient Egypt), 2–d (mummification = drying and wrapping the body), 3–a (amulet = protection object), 4–c (Book of the Dead = spells on papyrus rolls).

Q2. The correct order of the steps is: wash (1), remove brain (2), remove organs (3), dry in natron (4), wrap in bandages (5), place in coffin(s) or sarcophagus (6). So the boxes, in the order printed, read: 5, 1, 4, 2, 6, 3.

Q3. Imsety — human — liver; Hapi — baboon — lungs; Duamutef — jackal — stomach; Qebehsenuef — falcon — intestines.

Q4. Sample: (a) tombs changed from stone pyramids (Old Kingdom, about 2600 BCE at Giza) to hidden rock-cut tombs in the Valley of the Kings (from about 1539 BCE), because pyramids were robbed. (b) spell texts began as Pyramid Texts for kings only (about 2400–2300 BCE) and by the time the Book of the Dead was in use (from about 1550 BCE) could be bought by officials and scribes such as Hunefer.

Q5. (a) False — the heart stayed in the body; the stomach, intestines, liver and lungs went into canopic jars. (b) True. (c) False — pyramids belong to the Old Kingdom (about 2686–2181 BCE); New Kingdom kings used hidden rock-cut tombs. (d) True. (e) False — the Pyramid Texts were reserved for the king.

Q6. (a) grave goods, (b) natron, (c) ushabtis, (d) afterlife, (e) sarcophagus, (f) papyrus.

Q7. Sample: the heart was left in the body because Egyptians believed it would be weighed at judgement — this shows they believed in a moral test after death. Amulets were wrapped between the bandages for protection — this shows they believed the journey to the afterlife was dangerous. Any two steps with beliefs attached earn the marks.

Q8. Sample: mastabas (from about 3000 BCE) were mud-brick bench tombs for early kings and high officials; pyramids (Old Kingdom, about 2686–2181 BCE; e.g. Khufu’s at Giza, about 2600 BCE) were huge stone tombs for pharaohs, built to display their power and help them reach the afterlife. Rock-cut tombs (New Kingdom, about 1539–1075 BCE) were hidden in the Valley of the Kings. Design changed because pyramids advertised royal treasure and were robbed, so kings chose hidden, guarded tombs.

Q9. Sample: **For:** texts spread from kings only (Pyramid Texts, about 2400–2300 BCE) to wealthy officials (Coffin Texts, about 2100 BCE) to scribes like Ani and Hunefer (about 1250 BCE), so over time more kinds of people could have spells for the afterlife; the historian John Taylor (2010) traces this spread. **Against:** every step cost money — scribes, papyrus, coffins and tombs were paid work — so the poorest people, who were most of Egypt, were still buried simply; every surviving Book of the Dead belonged to someone wealthy or high-ranking. A reasoned judgement might be: access widened, but never became equal, because it followed wealth.

Q10. Sample: One continuity is the belief in judgement by the weighing of the heart, which appears in Coffin Texts of the Middle Kingdom (about 2040–1782 BCE) and is still the central scene in the Papyrus of Hunefer (about 1275 BCE) in the New Kingdom. One change is who could carry spells: at the pyramid of Unas (about 2353–2323 BCE) the Pyramid Texts were carved for the king alone, but by about 1250 BCE the scribe Ani could buy his own Book of the Dead papyrus, showing access had widened.

Inquiry task. Sample: (a) any two of: brain removed through the nose; cut in the side; organs removed; drying in natron; wrapping in linen; 70-day limit. (b) amulets tucked between the bandages. (c) No — one detail may be wrong (or may reflect different workshops and methods) while the rest matches physical evidence; sources are weighed as a whole. (d) Reliable: he visited Egypt and describes what he was told and saw, and mummies confirm the main steps; risky: he was an outsider, writing in Greek, about customs already ancient, and he may have mixed up details. (e) Sample: Herodotus is valuable because it is a detailed eyewitness-era account that matches the physical evidence on the main steps, so it is useful for the order and methods of mummification; but it is less useful for what Egyptians themselves believed, because he watched from outside.

Sources

All facts beyond the curriculum's own named referents (the Nile, Giza) carry a source line here, with retrieval date. Museum object numbers identify the real surviving objects.

- **Papyrus of Ani** (Book of the Dead, about 1250 BCE, 19th Dynasty; British Museum EA10470): owner Ani, a scribe of Thebes; about 24 m long. Verified via en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Papyrus_of_Ani, retrieved 24 August 2026.
- **Papyrus of Hunefer** (Book of the Dead, about 1275 BCE, 19th Dynasty; British Museum EA9901): owner Hunefer, scribe and steward under Pharaoh Seti I; weighing of the heart scene with Anubis, Thoth, Ammit, Horus and Osiris. Verified via en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Papyrus_of_Hunefer, retrieved 24 August 2026.
- **Herodotus, *Histories*, Book 2 (Euterpe)**, published about 440 BCE: description of Egyptian funeral customs and mummification methods ranked by cost (hook through the nose, cut along the flank, natron, linen bandages, 70 days). Verified via [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Histories_\(Herodotus\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Histories_(Herodotus)) and en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mummification, retrieved 24 August 2026.
- **Great Pyramid of Giza**, tomb of Pharaoh Khufu, built about 2600 BCE; part of the Giza pyramid complex with the pyramids of Khafre and Menkaure and the Great Sphinx; tallest human-made structure for over 3,700 years. Verified via en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Pyramid_of_Giza, retrieved 24 August 2026.
- **Step Pyramid of Djoser at Saqqara**, about 2667–2648 BCE, designed by Imhotep; the first Egyptian pyramid and first huge stone building in Egypt. Verified via en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pyramid_of_Djoser, retrieved 24 August 2026.
- **Pyramid Texts**: oldest known Egyptian religious writings; oldest complete set in the pyramid of King Unas at Saqqara (Unas ruled about 2353–2323 BCE; oldest spells about 2400–2300 BCE); reserved for royalty; no illustrations. Verified via en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pyramid_Texts, retrieved 24 August 2026.
- **Coffin Texts**: funerary spells written mainly on coffins from about 2100 BCE, chiefly in the Middle Kingdom; available to non-royal people who could afford a coffin. Verified via en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coffin_Texts, retrieved 24 August 2026.
- **Book of the Dead**: spells on papyrus from the start of the New Kingdom (about 1550 BCE) to about 50 BCE, placed in the coffin or burial chamber; the modern name was given by the scholar Karl Richard Lepsius. Verified via en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_the_Dead, retrieved 24 August 2026. Taylor, J. (2010), *Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead: Journey through the afterlife*, British Museum Press (named historian's interpretation used in Stage 6).
- **Valley of the Kings**: royal burial ground of the New Kingdom (Dynasties 18–20, about 1539–1075 BCE) across the Nile from Thebes (modern Luxor); about 65 tombs and chambers; hidden rock-cut tombs chosen because pyramids attracted tomb robbers. Verified via en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valley_of_the_Kings, retrieved 24 August 2026.
- **Tomb of Tutankhamun (KV62)**: found on 4 November 1922 by Howard Carter's team with Lord Carnarvon; most grave goods intact; 5,398 objects recorded; ten seasons of work, ending 1932. Verified via en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tomb_of_Tutankhamun, retrieved 24 August 2026.

- **Deir el-Medina:** New Kingdom village (about 1550–1080 BCE) of the craftsmen who built and decorated the royal tombs, near the Valley of the Kings; evidence includes houses, tombs, papyri, notes on broken pottery, letters, legal records, prayers and dream texts. Verified via en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deir_el-Medina, retrieved 24 August 2026.
- **Canopic jars and the four sons of Horus:** Imsety (human head, liver), Hapi (baboon, lungs), Duamutef (jackal, stomach), Qebehsenuef (falcon, intestines); the heart stayed in the body. Verified via en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canopic_jar, retrieved 24 August 2026.
- **Maat:** the standard of truth, balance, law, morality and justice; the goddess Maat and her feather as the measure in the weighing of the heart; all Egyptians, including the pharaoh, were expected to follow it. Verified via en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maat, retrieved 24 August 2026.
- **Bes and Taweret:** household guardian figures protecting mothers, children and childbirth; known from amulets, household items and images across Egyptian history. Verified via en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bes, retrieved 24 August 2026.
- **Ushabtis:** servant figures placed in tombs to work for the dead in the afterlife, often carrying a hoe and basket, from the Old Kingdom to Ptolemaic times; often inscribed with spell 6 in the Book of the Dead. Verified via en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ushabti, retrieved 24 August 2026.
- **Period dates:** Old Kingdom about 2686–2181 BCE (Dynasties III–VI, “age of the pyramids”); Middle Kingdom about 2040–1782 BCE (Dynasties XI–XII; Osiris rose in importance); Egyptian civilisation from unification about 3150 BCE to Roman control 30 BCE. Verified via en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Kingdom_of_Egypt, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle_Kingdom_of_Egypt and en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Egypt, retrieved 24 August 2026.

Egypt's turning points: events that changed the society

Curriculum anchor. VC2HH8K15. This section teaches elaboration .E02: the repeated poor Nile floods that helped cause the First Intermediate Period (about 2181–2055 BCE), studied through archaeological evidence and historians' interpretations. The other elaboration ids on this CD (.E01, .E03–.E05) are linkage keys to other sections and are not taught here.

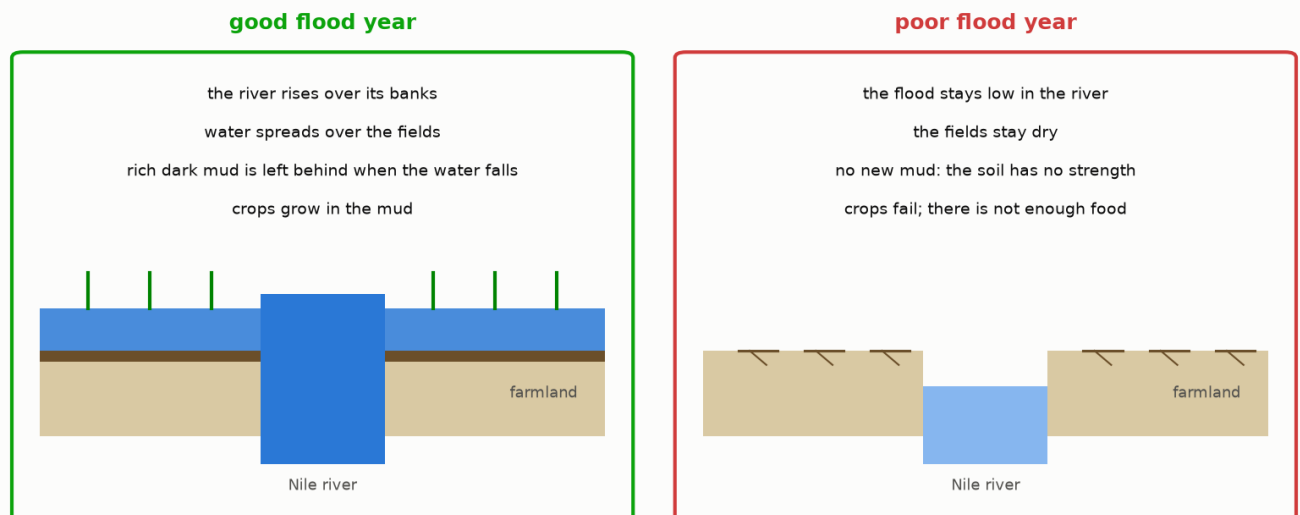
Theory

The big idea: a turning point. A **turning point** is a time when things stop going the way they were and start going a new way. Historians find turning points by asking about **causes** (what made it happen) and **consequences** (what changed because of it). In this section the turning point is the breakdown of Egypt's Old Kingdom around 2181 BCE.

The Nile's gift, in one sentence. Farming in ancient Egypt depended on the **inundation** — the flood of the Nile that came each year, watering the fields and leaving behind rich black silt (fine new soil). (Section 2A studies the river in detail; here we only need this one idea.) A good flood meant full granaries; a poor flood meant hunger.

A good flood year and a poor flood year

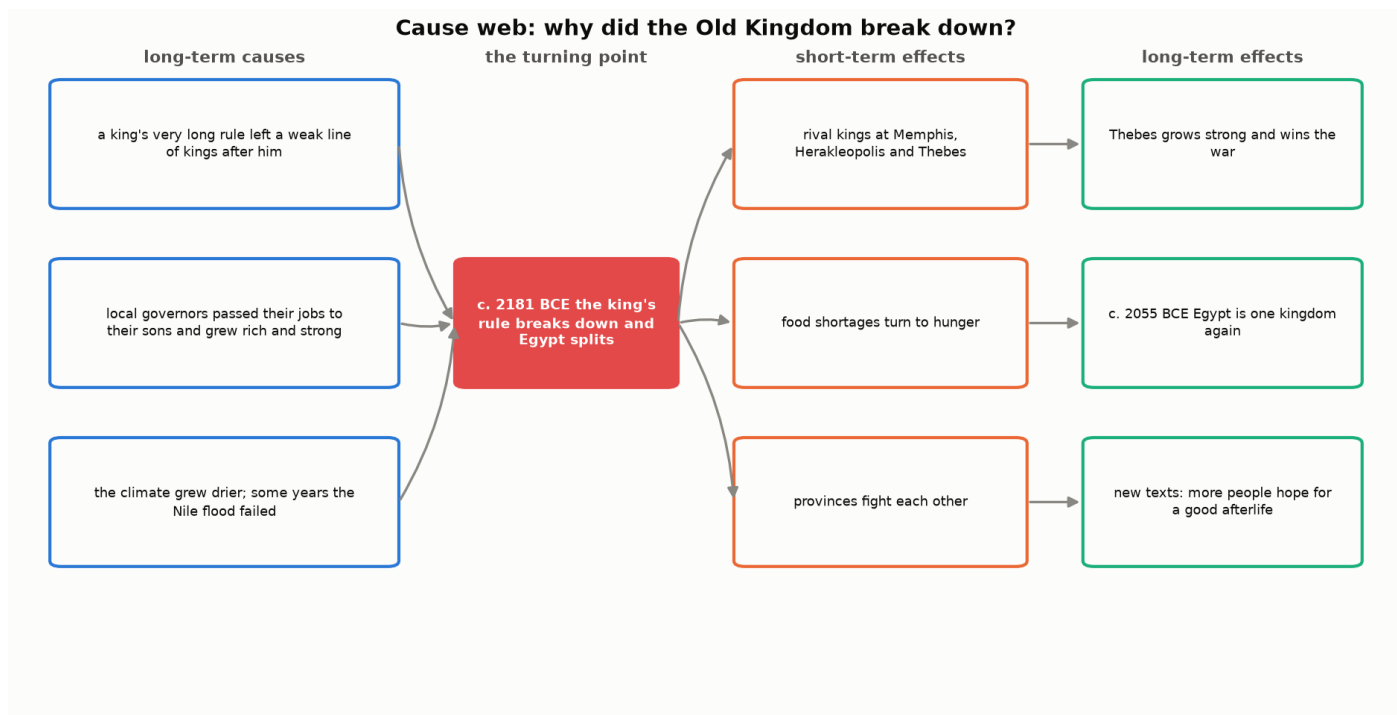
The Nile river seen from the side. Not to scale.



Two panels comparing a good Nile flood that waters the crops and leaves rich silt with a poor flood that leaves dry cracked fields and no crops

The Old Kingdom: one strong kingdom. From about 2686 to about 2181 BCE, one line of kings — a **dynasty**, a family in which the kingship passes on within the family — ruled all of Egypt from the city of Memphis. This is the age of the pyramids: the Step Pyramid of Djoser at Saqqara, and the Great Pyramid built at Giza for the king Khufu around 2600 BCE over about 26 years. The king's government collected grain in good years, so a poor flood in one place could be covered by grain from another.

The turning point, c. 2181 BCE. Three things came together. First, the king Pepi II ruled for a very long time (c. 2278–2214 BCE; his own records run to at least year 62), and the kings after him were weak. Second, the governors of the provinces — called **nomarchs** — had begun passing their jobs to their sons, and grew rich and strong in their own regions. Third, the climate grew drier, and the Nile flood failed year after year, so the granaries ran empty. Around 2181 BCE the king's rule broke down and Egypt split.



Cause web linking three long-term causes to the turning point at about 2181 BCE, then to short-term effects and long-term effects

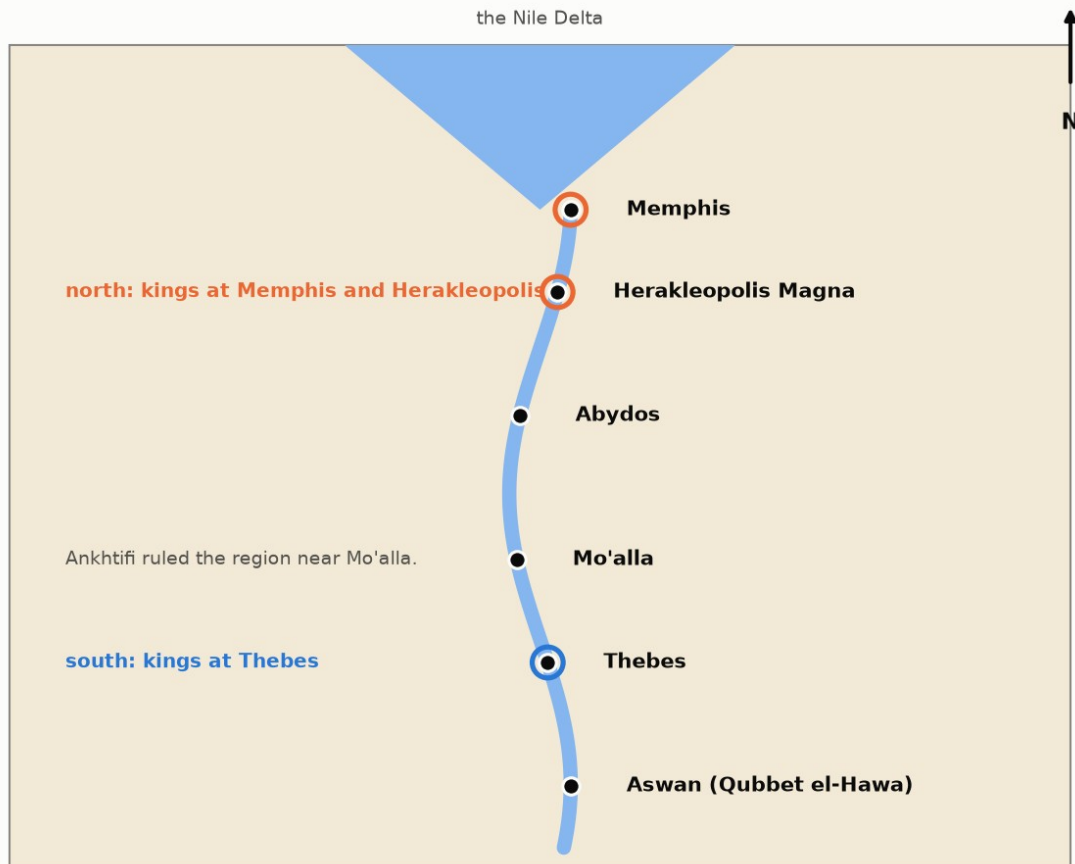
The First Intermediate Period, about 2181–2055 BCE. Historians call these years the **First Intermediate Period** — the gap *between* two great ages, the Old Kingdom and the Middle Kingdom. For the first time, Egypt had rival kings: two families in the north (at Memphis and at Herakleopolis Magna) and one in the south (at Thebes). A later Egyptian priest-historian, Manetho (writing around 300 BCE), claimed that 70 kings ruled for only 70 days — a story far bigger than the truth, but it shows how broken the time looked to later Egyptians.

dynasties	main city	what we know
7th and 8th	Memphis	kings tried to carry on the Old Kingdom line; short rules
9th and 10th	Herakleopolis Magna	a strong northern family; fought Thebes for the middle of Egypt
11th	Thebes	the family of Intef and Mentuhotep; won the war and reunited Egypt

Table of the rival king-families of the First Intermediate Period: dynasties 7 to 11 with their main cities and what we know of them

The Nile valley: rival kings of the First Intermediate Period

Not to scale. The Nile flows from south (bottom) to north (top).



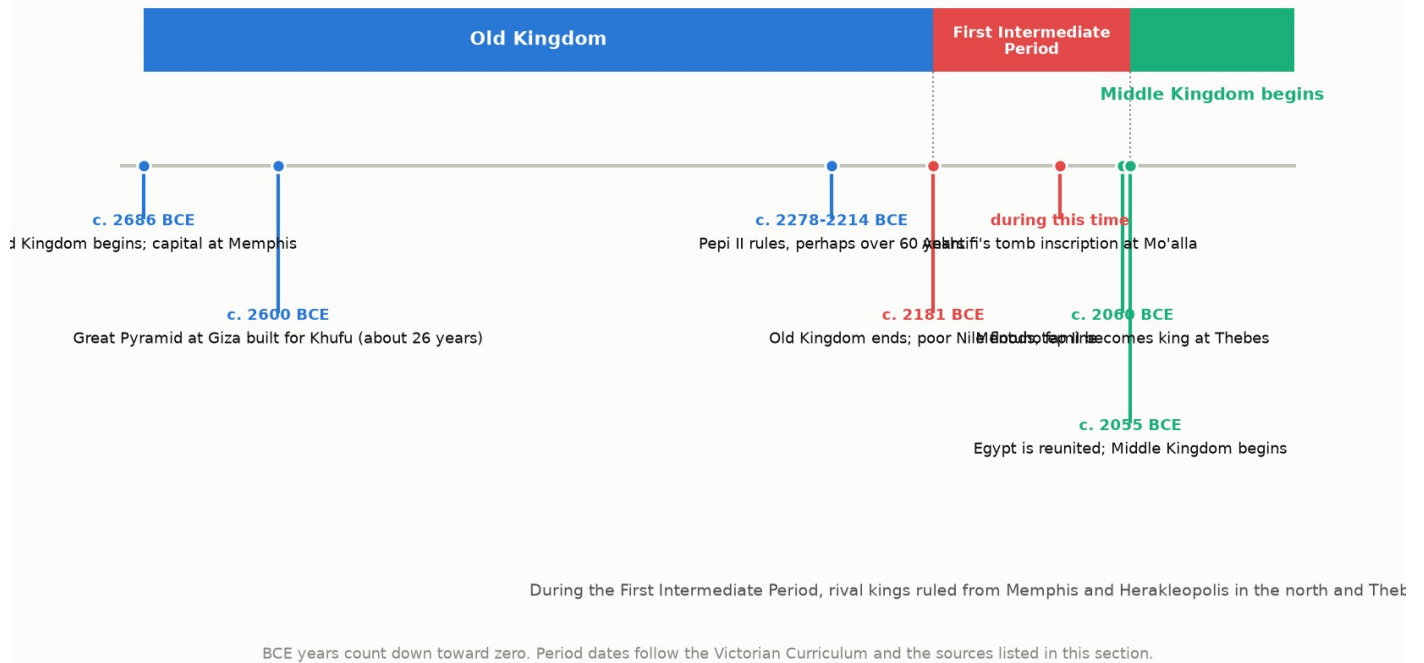
Simple map of the Nile valley showing the northern kings at Memphis and Herakleopolis Magna and the southern kings at Thebes, with the contested middle at Abydos

How do we know? The evidence. Historians test the story against three kinds of evidence.

- **Archaeology** — the study of the past through things people left behind. At Saqqara, the late king Ibi was buried under a small, roughly built pyramid: a sign of a poor, weak kingship. In the provinces, tombs got bigger and richer — the tomb of the nomarch Ankhtifi at Mo'alla, and the row of saff tombs at Thebes.
- **Written sources.** A **primary source** is one made at the time, by people who were there. In his tomb, Ankhtifi boasts that “all of Upper Egypt was dying of hunger” and that “I gave bread to the hungry”: a primary source, cut in stone by a man who was there. A poem of complaints called the Admonitions of Ipuwer even says “the river is blood” — kept on **papyrus**, paper made from reeds that grew by the Nile.
- **Climate and records.** The Palermo Stone, a royal record cut around 2450 BCE, lists the height of the flood year by year — the number the kings watched most closely. Studies of ancient climate point to a drier period with failed floods around 2200 BCE.

Egypt in crisis: from one kingdom to three, c. 2700-1950 BCE

Dates are approximate (BCE). Year zero is at the right.



Timeline from the Old Kingdom through the First Intermediate Period to the beginning of the Middle Kingdom, with key events marked

But wait: one source is not proof. The Ipuwer poem is a powerful source — and a tricky one. The copy we have was made around 1250 BCE, long after the events, and it is poetry with a purpose, not a report. Every source has a **perspective** — the point of view it is written from — so historians test it against the other evidence, exactly as the source card shows.

Source card: the Admonitions of Ipuwer

what it is a poem of complaints about Egypt turned upside down

the writing hieratic, a quick pen script, on papyrus

the copy we have made about 1250 BCE

when it was written probably earlier, in the Middle Kingdom

kept at National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden, Netherlands

"the river is blood"

what it helps us see how later Egyptians looked back at a time of trouble

why we question it it was copied long after the First Intermediate Period, and it is poetry, not a report - so we test it against other sources

Source card for the Admonitions of Ipuwer: what it is, the writing, the copy we have, where it is kept, and why historians question it

Historians' interpretations: two readings. An **interpretation** is a historian's careful reading of the evidence. Because the evidence pulls two ways, historians offer two readings of the First Intermediate Period, and both have real evidence behind them.

Two readings of the First Intermediate Period

Reading 1: a dark age

- texts like Ipuwer and Ankhtifi describe hunger and fighting
- few royal buildings; small tombs for kings
- rival kings fight over the middle of Egypt
- the name itself says a gap between two great ages

Reading 2: a time of change

- towns in the provinces grew; local tombs got richer
- afterlife texts reach more people, not just kings
- governors gave food to their own people and ruled them well
- the chaos texts were copied later, and may praise the new kings

Both readings agree: the king's rule broke down, the floods put Egypt under strain, and Thebes brought it back together.

Reading 2 follows historians like Ludwig David Morenz, who calls it a Period of Regions.

Two columns comparing two historians' readings of the First Intermediate Period, a dark age and a time of change, with what both readings agree on

Reading 1 says: poor floods caused hunger, hunger caused fighting, and Egypt collapsed into a dark age. Reading 2 says: the king's rule broke down, but the regions grew — towns got bigger, local rulers gave food to their own people, and more people than ever wrote texts hoping for a good afterlife. Some historians, such as Ludwig David Morenz, therefore call it a “Period of Regions”, a time of change rather than a dark age. Others, such as J. G. Manning, caution against blaming the floods alone: a kingdom that broke when the floods failed was already brittle. The fair reading holds both ideas at once — the floods strained Egypt, *and* the kingdom's weaknesses turned that strain into a turning point.

Reunification: Thebes wins. The Theban family fought its way north: Intef II beat the rival town of Nekhen around 2060 BCE, Intef III took the contested middle at Abydos, and Mentuhotep II completed the winning of the war in the years around 2055 BCE. Egypt had one king again: the Middle Kingdom begins.

Continuity and change — the pay-off. **Continuity** is what stayed the same; **change** is what became different.

- Changed:** one strong king gave way to rival kings, then to one king again; provinces and nomarchs were far stronger than before; far more ordinary people shared in afterlife texts and rich local tombs.
- Continued:** farming still followed the Nile flood; Egyptians still honoured the same gods, used the same writing, and expected a king to keep order — the Middle Kingdom copied the Old Kingdom on purpose.

That pattern — change wrapped inside continuity — is exactly what a turning point looks like in history.

Worked examples

Example 1 — with help

Using the cause web, explain how repeated poor Nile floods helped end the Old Kingdom. Quote one piece of evidence.

Working	Comment
Long-term causes: a very long reign left weak kings after Pepi II; nomarchs passed their jobs to their sons and grew strong.	Causes that built up <i>before</i> the turning point.
Trigger: the climate grew drier and the flood failed year after year, so the granaries ran empty.	The weak government could not cover the poor floods.

Working	Comment
Turning point, c. 2181 BCE: the king's rule breaks down and Egypt splits between rival kings.	The event the causes point to.
Evidence: in his tomb at Mo'alla, the nomarch Ankhtifi wrote that "all of Upper Egypt was dying of hunger" and that <i>he</i> gave people food.	A primary source: with the king weak, a local man claims the king's job.
Consequences: short-term, hunger and fighting; long-term, stronger provinces and, by c. 2055 BCE, reunification under Thebes.	Causes and consequences join up to make the turning point.

Example 2 — with help

A student says: "The Ipuwer poem says the river is blood, so the Nile really turned to blood. That proves the floods caused the breakdown." Use the source card to test this claim.

Working	Comment
Ask what the source is: a poem of complaints, not a report. Poetry uses big images like "the river is blood".	The <i>form</i> of a source changes how we read it.
Ask when: our copy was made c. 1250 BCE, hundreds of years after c. 2181 BCE; it was probably written later too, looking back.	A source made long after the event is not an eyewitness.
Ask why: complaints of chaos can praise the new kings who "fixed" things.	Every source has a purpose and a perspective.
Test against other evidence: Ankhtifi's tomb and the climate studies do support hunger and poor floods — but not a river of blood.	Historians verify one source against others.
Better claim: the poem shows how later Egyptians <i>remembered</i> the trouble; archaeology and climate studies show the poor floods were real.	A sourced, careful claim beats a quoted one.

The model paragraph below shows how claims like this get written up.

Model answer: using a source in a paragraph

point	One turning point in ancient Egypt was the breakdown of the Old Kingdom, around 2181 BCE.
evidence	A governor called Ankhtifi wrote in his tomb at Mo'alla that all of Upper Egypt was dying of hunger.
explain	This is a primary source, and it claims the hunger was so bad that a local ruler wrote about it in stone. It shows that with the king's government weak, local men like Ankhtifi took charge of feeding people.
link	So the poor floods did not just cut the crops; they helped turn one strong kingdom into many rival rules.

■ point
 ■ evidence
 ■ explain
 ■ link back to the turning point

Model paragraph in four colour-coded parts: point, evidence, explain, and link back to the turning point

Practice questions

Practice with help

Q1. Use the timeline. (a) About how many years did the Old Kingdom last (c. 2686–2181 BCE)? (b) Which event on the timeline is the turning point? (c) What begins around 2055 BCE?

Q2. Use the inundation panels. (a) Name the two things a good flood brings to the fields. (b) In one sentence, explain why repeated poor floods meant hunger even before any fighting began.

Q3. In your own words, define: (a) dynasty; (b) nomarch; (c) inundation.

Q4. Use the map. (a) Name the two cities of the northern kings and the one city of the southern kings. (b) Which site sat in the contested middle between the two sides? (c) Which king's family ruled near Ankhtifi's home region of Mo'alla?

Q5. Sort these into *long-term cause*, *short-term effect* or *long-term effect* of the breakdown: (a) provinces fight each other; (b) nomarchs pass their jobs to their sons; (c) Thebes reunites Egypt under one king; (d) a very long reign leaves weak kings after it; (e) food shortages turn to hunger.

Q6. Sort these into *archaeology* or *written source*: (a) Ibi's small pyramid at Saqqara; (b) the Ipuwer poem on papyrus; (c) Ankhtifi's words cut in his tomb at Mo'alla; (d) the saff tombs at Thebes; (e) the Palermo Stone's flood heights. Which two of the written sources are primary sources made near the time of the events?

Practice on your own

Q7. "Repeated poor Nile inundations were a cause of the end of the Old Kingdom." Argue for this claim with one piece of archaeology and one written source.

Q8. Give two changes and two continuities between the Old Kingdom and the First Intermediate Period.

Q9. Ankhtifi wrote his own words in his own tomb. Why might that make him an unreliable witness about the hunger? Answer in two sentences using the word *perspective*.

Q10. "The First Intermediate Period was a dark age." Use both readings from the interpretations figure to agree *and* disagree with this claim.

Source inquiry

Q11. Plan a short inquiry into the claim "poor Nile floods caused the First Intermediate Period". (a) Write three historical questions you would ask of the Ipuwer source card. (b) For each question, name one *other* source from this section (archaeology, inscriptions or climate records) that could help answer it. (c) Then write a four-sentence answer to the claim, following the point–evidence–explain–link model.

Answers

Q1. (a) About 500 years. (b) c. 2181 BCE, the Old Kingdom ends (poor floods, hunger). (c) The Middle Kingdom, with Egypt reunited. **Q2.** (a) Water and rich black silt. (b) No flood → no water and no new silt → crops fail → granaries run empty. **Q3.** (a) A family of kings in which the kingship passes on within the family. (b) A governor of an Egyptian province. (c) The Nile flood that came each year, watering fields and leaving silt. **Q4.** (a) North: Memphis and Herakleopolis Magna; south: Thebes. (b) Abydos. (c) The northern kings (Herakleopolis Magna), as Mo'alla sits south of Abydos but north of Thebes' power. **Q5.** Long-term causes: (b), (d). Short-term effects: (a), (e). Long-term effect: (c). **Q6.** Archaeology: (a), (d). Written: (b), (c), (e). Primary near the time: Ankhtifi's tomb words (c) and the Palermo Stone (e). **Q7.** Sample: climate studies and the Palermo Stone's flood record show poor floods; Ankhtifi's "all of Upper Egypt was dying of hunger" shows the king could no longer feed people — a cause of the breakdown. **Q8.** Changes: rival kings instead of one; stronger nomarchs and provinces; afterlife texts reach more people. Continuities: Nile-flood farming; same gods and writing; kingship still expected to keep order. **Q9.** Sample: a tomb is a boast, so Ankhtifi's perspective is a local ruler praising himself; he may have made the hunger sound deeper to make his own feeding of people look greater. **Q10.** Agree: hunger texts, fighting and small royal tombs. Disagree: richer tombs in the provinces, growing towns and wider afterlife texts show change and regional strength, not only darkness. **Q11.** Sample in fully-worked solutions.

Fully-worked solutions

Q1. (a) $2686 - 2181 = 505$, so about 500 years. (b) The turning point is c. 2181 BCE: "Old Kingdom ends; poor Nile floods, famine". (c) Around 2055 BCE Egypt is reunited and the Middle Kingdom begins.

Q2. (a) A good flood brings water and rich black silt. (b) Because every crop depended on the flood, several poor floods in a row meant empty fields and empty granaries — hunger began with the weather, before any fighting.

Q3. (a) A dynasty is a family of kings: the kingship stays in the family. (b) A nomarch is a governor of a province; in the First Intermediate Period nomarchs passed the job to their sons. (c) The inundation is the Nile flood that came each year, watering the fields and leaving fertile silt behind.

Q4. (a) The northern kings ruled at Memphis and Herakleopolis Magna; the southern kings at Thebes. (b) Abydos, in the middle, changed hands in the war. (c) Mo'alla lies well south, but Ankhtifi's tomb shows a local ruler fighting for the northern side against Thebes — the map's rings show the two rival families, and Mo'alla sat in the contested south.

Q5. (b) and (d) are long-term causes (they built up before 2181 BCE). (a) and (e) are short-term effects (hunger and fighting right after the breakdown). (c) is the long-term effect (reunification under Thebes by c. 2055 BCE).

Q6. Archaeology (things left behind): Ibi's small pyramid (a) and the saff tombs (d). Written sources: the Ipuwer poem (b), Ankhtifi's tomb words (c), the Palermo Stone (e). The two primary sources made near the time are Ankhtifi's tomb words — cut by a man who lived through the hunger — and the Palermo Stone, whose flood record runs from the Old Kingdom. (The Ipuwer copy is later, c. 1250 BCE.)

Q7. A good answer chains cause to consequence with dated evidence. The Palermo Stone shows the flood height was the number the Old Kingdom watched, and climate studies point to drier years and failed floods around 2200 BCE. With weak kings after Pepi II and strong nomarchs, the government could not cover the shortage. Ankhtifi, a nomarch living through it, wrote at Mo'alla that "all of Upper Egypt was dying of hunger" and that he himself gave people food — a primary source showing the king's core job (feeding Egypt) had failed. Poor floods were therefore not the only cause, but a real cause of the breakdown: they turned weakness into a turning point.

Q8. Changes: (1) one king became rival kings at Memphis, Herakleopolis Magna and Thebes; (2) nomarchs and provinces grew stronger, and afterlife texts and rich tombs reached far more people. Continuities: (1) life still followed the Nile flood and its farming; (2) Egyptians kept the same gods, the same writing, and the idea that a king must keep order — the Middle Kingdom copied the Old Kingdom on purpose.

Q9. A tomb inscription is a boast meant to make its owner look good, so Ankhtifi's perspective is that of a local ruler praising himself. He had a reason to paint the hunger in the darkest colours: the deeper the hunger, the greater his

claim “I gave bread to the hungry” sounds. That does not make him a liar — historians check him against other sources — but it means we weigh his words, not just quote them.

Q10. A good answer gives each reading its strongest form. Agree (Reading 1): primary texts like Ankhtifi’s and Ipuwer’s describe hunger and fighting; royal building shrank to small tombs like Ibi’s; rival kings fought over the middle at Abydos. Disagree (Reading 2): towns in the provinces grew, local tombs got richer, nomarchs gave their own people food, and afterlife texts reached many more people — change and regional strength, not only collapse; and the chaos texts were copied later, under kings who gained from the story. Conclusion: the period was a dark age for the *king’s* Egypt, and a time of change and growth for the regions — which is why historians debate it.

Q11. Sample plan. (a) Questions for the Ipuwer card: 1. Was the poem written by someone who saw the breakdown? 2. What was the poem for — report, or persuasion? 3. Does its picture of chaos match what was found in the ground? (b) Matching sources: 1. the card’s “copy made c. 1250 BCE” line plus the Palermo Stone’s near-time flood record; 2. the card’s “why we question it” line (poetry with a purpose) checked against Ankhtifi’s self-praising tomb; 3. the archaeology row — Ibi’s small pyramid and the rich tombs in the provinces. (c) Model answer: One turning point in ancient Egypt was the breakdown of the Old Kingdom around 2181 BCE. The Ipuwer poem claims chaos — “the river is blood” — and Ankhtifi’s tomb says all of Upper Egypt was dying of hunger, while climate studies point to failed floods around 2200 BCE. Because Ipuwer is later poetry and Ankhtifi is a boast, historians test both against archaeology, which confirms weak kings (Ibi’s small pyramid) and strong provinces (the saff tombs). So poor floods were a real cause of the turning point — but they broke a kingdom that was already brittle, and the consequences ran from hunger to reunification under Thebes by c. 2055 BCE.

Sources and dates

- **Curriculum (scope authority):** Victorian Curriculum 2.0, Humanities — History (Levels 7–8 band), VC2HH8K15 and elaboration .E02, VCAA export VC2_Humanities_29-07-2026.docx (retrieved 29 July 2026, re-read 21 August 2026).
- **Wikipedia, “First Intermediate Period of Egypt”** — dynasties 7–11 at Memphis, Herakleopolis Magna and Thebes; Manetho’s “70 kings in 70 days”; Ankhtifi at Mo’alla; Intef II at Nekhen c. 2060 BCE, Intef III at Abydos, Mentuhotep II’s reunification; the 22nd-century BCE drought and failed floods; Morenz’s “Period of Regions” and J. G. Manning’s caution on tying the breakdown to Nile flood history (retrieved 24 August 2026).
- **Wikipedia, “Old Kingdom of Egypt”** — c. 2686–2181 BCE, Dynasties 3–6, Memphis; Djoser at Saqqara; Khufu’s Great Pyramid at Giza c. 2600 BCE built over about 26 years; Pepi II c. 2278–2214 BCE with records to year 62 (retrieved 24 August 2026).
- **Wikipedia, “Admonitions of Ipuwer”** — P. Leiden I 344, kept at the National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden, Netherlands; copy c. 1250 BCE, probably composed earlier; “the river is blood”; debate over its value as evidence (retrieved 24 August 2026).
- **Wikipedia, “Palermo Stone”** — a royal record cut around 2450 BCE, listing Nile flood heights year by year (retrieved 24 August 2026).
- **Ankhtifi’s tomb inscription at Mo’alla** — “all of Upper Egypt was dying of hunger”; “I gave bread to the hungry” (as quoted in the First Intermediate Period article, retrieved 24 August 2026).

Contact, conflict, conquest and trade: ancient Egypt and other societies

Ancient Egypt is often drawn as a land apart - a gift of the Nile, surrounded by desert. But Egypt was never truly alone. Ships crossed the sea to its north, caravans crossed the sand to its east and south, and armies marched both ways. In this section we look at how Egypt was joined to the rest of its world in three ways: by **trade**, by **conflict** (fighting and war), and by **conquest** (taking control of other lands by force). We end with one of the most famous results of all that contact: the world's first written peace treaty.

What this section is about

Curriculum code: VC2HH8K16

This is the second chapter's depth study of **Egypt**, so we focus on two curriculum examples (the ones labelled Egypt):

- **Contact and conflict:** what Egypt's contact with other societies changed — trade with neighbours across the eastern Mediterranean, and the New Kingdom's Battle of Kadesh, which ended in the peace treaty Rameses II made with the Hittites (VC2HH8K16.E03)
- **The empire:** what made Egypt's empire rise and expand, and what that changed (VC2HH8K16.E04)

Key words are written in **bold** the first time they appear, and each one is explained there.

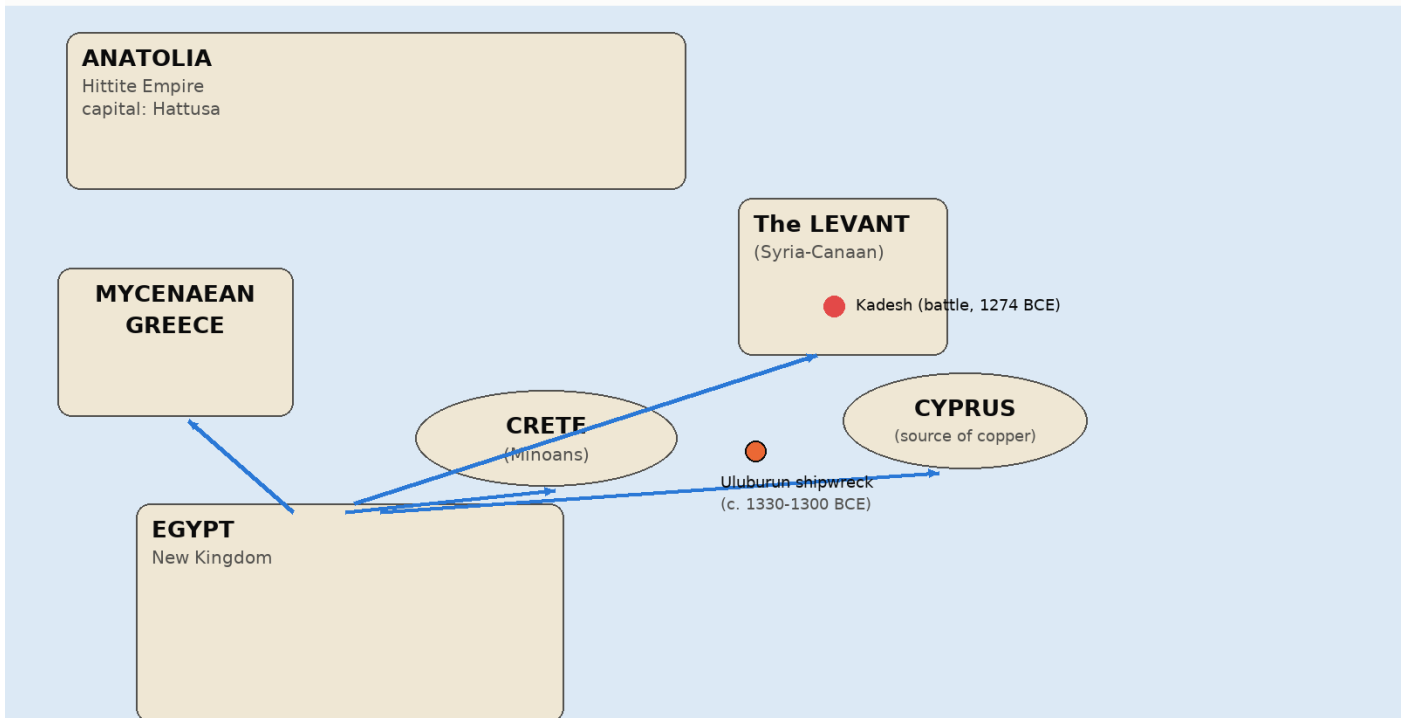
Part 1 - Contact and trade: Egypt and its neighbours

Contact means societies meeting one another - to talk, to trade, or to fight. Long before the famous battles, Egypt's most common contact with its neighbours was peaceful: **trade**, the buying, selling and swapping of goods between places.

Look at the map below. Egypt sits at the bottom left, on the edge of the eastern Mediterranean Sea. Around it are the other societies of the Bronze Age: **Cyprus**, the island of **Crete** (home of the **Minoans**), **Mycenaean Greece**, the coastal strip called the **Levant**, and to the north the land of the **Hittites** in **Anatolia**. The arrows show routes of trade and contact.

Egypt and its neighbours

Trade and contact across the eastern Mediterranean in the Bronze Age. Arrows show routes of trade and contact.



Adapted for study. Sources: World History Encyclopedia (Battle of Kadesh; Uluburun Ship; Minoan Civilisation; Mycenaean Civilisation), retrieved 24 August 2026.

A map of the eastern Mediterranean showing Egypt at bottom left, with arrows of trade and contact reaching Cyprus, Crete, Mycenaean Greece and the Levant, and the Hittite Empire to the north. The battle site Kadesh and the Uluburun shipwreck are marked.

Trade moved goods in both directions. The table below shows some of what travelled, and - just as important - how we know. Notice the last column: historians do not guess. Every good is backed by a piece of **evidence** (a clue from the past), such as a real shipwreck or a real letter.

What moved between Egypt and other societies

Goods travelled both ways. Historians know this from shipwrecks, letters and objects found by archaeologists.

Good	Where it came from	The evidence
Copper	Cyprus	Uluburun shipwreck: 348 copper ingots, about 10 tonnes
Tin	Afghanistan or Turkey	Uluburun shipwreck: 120 tin ingots
Resin (for perfume)	Canaan (the Levant)	Uluburun shipwreck: about 150 Canaanite jars
Ebony and ivory	lands to the south	Uluburun shipwreck: ebony logs and an elephant tusk
Glass and beads	several places	Uluburun shipwreck: glass ingots and ~70,000 beads
Pottery	Mycenaean Greece	Mycenaean pots found by archaeologists in Egypt
Gold (sent out)	Egypt	Amarna Letters: "gold is as plentiful as dust"
Ivory (sold)	Egypt	Records show Minoans on Crete bought Egyptian ivory

Sources: World History Encyclopedia (Uluburun Ship; Minoan Civilisation; Mycenaean Civilisation); Wikipedia (Amarna letters). Retrieved 24 August 2026.

A table of traded goods. It lists copper from Cyprus, tin, resin, ebony and ivory, glass and beads, and pottery, with the evidence for each, such as the Uluburun shipwreck and Mycenaean pots found in Egypt.

The Uluburun shipwreck: trade we can touch

The best single piece of evidence for this trade is a real ship. Around 1330-1300 BCE a trading ship sank off the coast of what is now Turkey, near a place called Uluburun. Archaeologists raised its cargo: about 348 copper ingots (blocks) from Cyprus weighing about 10 tonnes, 120 tin ingots, jars of resin used for perfume, ebony logs, an elephant tusk, glass ingots and around 70,000 beads. The ship was probably on its way toward the Greek mainland. One sunken ship proves that copper, tin, ivory and glass really did move between Cyprus, the Levant, Egypt and Greece.

The Amarna Letters: diplomacy on clay

A second body of evidence is a set of clay tablets called the **Amarna Letters**, found at the Egyptian city of Akhetaten (now Tell el-Amarna). They are letters between the pharaoh and other kings, and between the pharaoh and his **vassals** - local rulers in the Levant who had to obey him and send him goods. The letters talk about friendship, marriages between royal families, and gifts. They are perhaps the first examples of **diplomacy** - rulers talking and making deals to keep the peace instead of fighting.

The letters also show what other kings wanted most from Egypt: gold. One king, Tushratta of Mitanni, wrote to the pharaoh, "In my brother's country gold is as plentiful as dust," and asked, "May my brother send me much gold." Egypt's gold made it a powerful friend - and a powerful partner in trade.

Part 2 - Conflict: the Battle of Kadesh

Contact was not always peaceful. As Egypt and the Hittite Empire both grew, they began to want the same lands in the Levant. That led to the **Battle of Kadesh** in 1274 BCE, one of the best-recorded battles of the ancient world. The two sides were **Rameses II** of Egypt (a **pharaoh** is the king of ancient Egypt) and **Muwatalli II** of the Hittites. Much of the fighting was done with the **chariot**, a light two-wheeled war cart pulled by horses.

Here is the fascinating part for a historian: **both sides claimed victory**. The diagram below puts the two claims side by side, then shows what historians conclude. This is a chance to see that history is often **contested** - that is, people argue about what really happened, because each side left its own proud account.

The Battle of Kadesh - who really won?

In 1274 BCE the two biggest powers of the age met at Kadesh. Each side said it won. Historians weigh both claims.

The facts both sides agree on

When: 1274 BCE Where: Kadesh, in Syria Who: Rameses II of Egypt vs Muwatalli II of the Hittites
After the battle, the Hittites were pushed back - but they kept control of Kadesh.

Egypt's claim

Rameses II carved poems and pictures on his temples.

He said he "routed his enemies" - beaten them completely - all by himself.

But he also said he did not try to capture Kadesh.

The Hittites' claim

Hittite records tell the other side of the story.

They say Rameses was "forced to depart from Kadesh in defeat".

That is, they say HE was the one who had to leave.

What historians say

Modern historians call the result a draw (a stalemate).

The historian Trevor Bryce says Egypt won the day's fighting, but the Hittites won in the end, because they kept Kadesh.

So who won? Nobody won outright.

About 15 years later, the two sides stopped fighting and signed the world's first written peace treaty.

Sources: Wikipedia (Battle of Kadesh), incl. the view of historian Trevor Bryce; World History Encyclopedia (Battle of Kadesh). Retrieved 24 August 2026.

A diagram of the Battle of Kadesh showing Egypt's claim, the Hittites' claim and what historians say, concluding that nobody won outright and that the two sides later signed a peace treaty.

Notice the skill on display. A primary source (the Egyptian temple carvings, or the Hittite records) is not automatically true. It tells us what one side *wanted* people to believe. Historians read both sides, weigh them, and use other evidence to judge. That is why modern historians call Kadesh a draw, and why the historian Trevor Bryce says Egypt won the day's fighting but the Hittites won in the end, because they kept control of Kadesh.

Part 3 - From conflict to peace: the first written peace treaty

The Battle of Kadesh did not end the rivalry. But about fifteen years later, in about 1259 BCE, Rameses II and the Hittite king **Hattusili III** agreed to stop fighting. The result is often called the world's first written peace treaty. A **treaty** is a formal written deal between rulers or states to end a war or keep the peace.

What makes this treaty amazing for historians is that **both sides' copies survive**, and they match. The diagram below shows the two versions.

The world's first written peace treaty

About 1259 BCE, Rameses II of Egypt and Hattusili III of the Hittites agreed to stop fighting. Two copies survive.

Why this treaty matters

It is the oldest peace treaty we still have - and the only ancient treaty where BOTH sides' copies survive.

Egypt's copy

Written in hieroglyphs
(Egyptian picture writing).

Engraved on the walls of two
temples Rameses II built at
Thebes:

- the Ramesseum
- the Temple of Karnak

The Hittites' copy

Written in cuneiform
(wedge-shaped marks on clay).

Found at Hattusa, the Hittite
capital, on baked clay tablets.

Today the tablets are kept in
museums in Istanbul and Berlin.

The two copies match

The clay tablets "corresponded with the Egyptian text" - each side kept its own record of the same deal. Today a copy of the treaty hangs at the United Nations as a symbol of peace.

Source: Wikipedia (Egyptian-Hittite peace treaty), retrieved 24 August 2026.

A diagram of the peace treaty showing the Egyptian copy engraved in hieroglyphs on temple walls at Thebes and the Hittite copy written in cuneiform on clay tablets found at Hattusa, with a note that a copy hangs at the United Nations.

This is exactly one of the “developments” named in your curriculum: contact and conflict can lead to **peace treaties**. It is also why a copy of the treaty hangs at the United Nations today, as a symbol that even great rivals can choose peace.

Part 4 - How the Egyptian Empire rose and expanded

Kadesh and the treaty happened during a long period called the **New Kingdom** (about 1570-about 1069 BCE), which historians call “the time of Imperial Egypt.” During it, Egypt became an **empire** - a group of lands and peoples ruled by one powerful state. Your curriculum asks you to look at the **causes** (why it happened) and **consequences** (what resulted) of that rise and expansion.

The chart below lays those out. (One of the causes, a **buffer zone**, is a strip of friendly land between your own country and your enemies, meant to slow down an attack.) Read the left column (causes), then the right column (consequences).

Why Egypt built an empire - and what it caused

A cause makes something happen; a consequence is what happens as a result.

CAUSES

why it happened

Foreign rule

The Hyksos, from outside Egypt, took control of Lower Egypt. Egyptians saw they could be invaded.

A strong new king

Ahmose I drove the Hyksos out (c. 1570 BCE) and began to secure and expand Egypt's borders.

Buffer zones

Rulers wanted friendly land between Egypt and its enemies, to stop future attacks.

Wealth

Egypt wanted valuable goods, like gold, and control of trade routes.



CONSEQUENCES

what resulted

An empire is born

The New Kingdom (c. 1570-1069 BCE) - a time of 'Imperial Egypt' and strong pharaohs.

More land and power

Pharaohs like Thutmose III won battles (Megiddo) and controlled land into the Levant.

More wealth and trade

Egypt gained goods and gold, and joined the 'Club of Great Powers'.

Diplomacy and conflict

Letters and gifts (Amarna) - and wars with the Hittites that ended in the first peace treaty.

Sources: World History Encyclopedia (New Kingdom of Egypt; Battle of Megiddo; Amarna Letters; Battle of Kadesh). Retrieved 24 August 2026.

A cause and consequence chart. The left column lists causes: foreign rule by the Hyksos, a strong new king in Ahmose I, buffer zones, and the wish for wealth. The right column lists consequences: an empire is born, more land and power, more wealth and trade, and diplomacy and conflict ending in the first peace treaty.

The timeline below puts the whole story in order, from the start of the New Kingdom to the peace treaty.

The Egyptian Empire grows

Key moments of the New Kingdom, in order. All dates are BCE (Before Common Era).

c. 1570 BCE

New Kingdom begins

Ahmose I drives out the Hyksos and founds a new royal house (the 18th Dynasty).

earlier

c. 1457 BCE

Battle of Megiddo

Thutmose III defeats a rebellion and pushes Egypt's control into the Levant.

c. 1350 BCE

Amarna Letters

Kings and vassals swap letters and gifts - early diplomacy on clay tablets.

c. 1274 BCE

Battle of Kadesh

Rameses II meets the Hittites at Kadesh. Both sides claim victory.

c. 1300 BCE

Uluburun ship sails

A trade ship carries copper, tin and ivory across the sea. (It sinks off today's Turkey.)

c. 1259 BCE

The peace treaty

Rameses II and Hattusili III of the Hittites agree peace - the first written one we have.

later

Sources: World History Encyclopedia (New Kingdom of Egypt; Battle of Megiddo; Amarna Letters; Uluburun Ship; Battle of Kadesh); Wikipedia (Egyptian-Hittite peace treaty). Retrieved 24 August 2026. Spacing is to scale.

A scaled timeline from about 1570 BCE to about 1259 BCE, showing the New Kingdom beginning under Ahmose I, the Battle of Megiddo under Thutmose III, the Amarna Letters, the Uluburun ship, the Battle of Kadesh, and the peace treaty.

A few of these moments are worth naming:

- **About 1570 BCE - Ahmose I** forced out the **Hyksos**, foreign rulers who had taken control of Lower Egypt. He founded a new royal family line (a **dynasty**) and began to secure and expand Egypt's borders.

- **About 1457 BCE - Thutmose III** won the **Battle of Megiddo**, beating a rebellion of vassals and pushing Egyptian control into the Levant. This expansion is how the buffer zones became an empire.
- **About 1274 and about 1259 BCE** - the Battle of Kadesh, and then the peace treaty, described above.

So the empire grew from a hard lesson (the Hyksos invasion) into a long age of power, wealth, trade, diplomacy - and, at times, war.

The sources we use in this section

Historians build all of the above from **sources**. A **primary source** is something made at the time being studied. A **secondary source** is something made later, by someone looking back (such as a modern history book). The table below lists the main sources for this section and what each one tells us.

The evidence historians use

A primary source comes from the time being studied. A secondary source is made later, by someone looking back.

Source	What kind of source	What it tells us	Primary or secondary?
The Uluburun shipwreck	A real ship and its cargo	What was traded: copper, tin, ivory, glass and beads	Primary
The Amarna Letters	Clay tablets with writing	How kings and vassals talked, swapped gifts and asked for gold	Primary
Kadesh battle accounts	Poems and carvings on temples	Egypt's side of the story - Rameses says he won	Primary
The peace treaty	Two matching copies (wall + clay)	The deal both sides made, in each side's own words	Primary
Mycenaean pots in Egypt	Objects found by archaeologists	That goods from Greece reached Egypt	Primary
A modern history book (e.g. Trevor Bryce)	Written thousands of years later	An expert's judgement about what the evidence means	Secondary

Sources: World History Encyclopedia (Uluburun Ship; Amarna Letters; Battle of Kadesh; Mycenaean Civilisation); Wikipedia (Egyptian-Hittite peace treaty; Battle of Kadesh). R

A table of sources: the Uluburun shipwreck, the Amarna Letters, the Kadesh battle accounts, the peace treaty, Mycenaean pots found in Egypt, and a modern history book. It marks each as a primary or secondary source and says what it tells us.

Worked examples

Worked example 1 - reading a primary source (with help)

Task: Read the line from the Amarna Letters, “In my brother’s country gold is as plentiful as dust.” What does it tell us about Egypt’s contact with other societies?

Step	What we do	What we find
1. Identify the source	Who wrote it, and when?	A foreign king (Tushratta of Mitanni) wrote to the pharaoh, in the 14th century BCE. It is a primary source.
2. Read what it says	What is the literal meaning?	He says Egypt has so much gold it is

Step	What we do	What we find
3. Make an inference (draw a sensible conclusion from the evidence)	What does it suggest?	like dust, and he asks the pharaoh to send him a lot of it. Other rulers saw Egypt as very rich in gold, and they wanted it. Gold was a key part of Egypt's contact with other states.
4. Check the limit	What can it NOT tell us?	It is one king's view, written to get a gift. It does not prove exact amounts of gold. We would check it against other evidence, like the gold objects and trade goods found by archaeologists.

So: the line is strong evidence that gold made Egypt a powerful trading and diplomatic partner - but we note it is one side, written with a purpose.

Worked example 2 - writing causes and consequences (with help)

Task: Answer the question, “Why did Egypt build an empire, and what were the results?” The box below is a model answer, and the tags on the right show what each part of it is doing. Copy this pattern in your own writing.

Model answer

Question: Why did Egypt build an empire, and what were the results?

Egypt built an empire mainly for safety. Earlier, foreign rulers called the Hyksos had taken control of Lower Egypt. Because of this, Egyptian kings wanted friendly land between Egypt and their enemies, to stop new attacks. King Ahmose I drove the Hyksos out (c. 1570 BCE) and began to expand Egypt's borders. This expansion had big results. Egypt gained land and wealth, and became one of the 'great powers'. But it also brought Egypt into conflict with the Hittites. This led to the Battle of Kadesh (c. 1274 BCE), and finally to the first written peace treaty.

What makes this a good answer

Egypt built an empire mainly for safety.	Topic sentence - states a cause
...the Hyksos had taken control of Lower Egypt.	Uses evidence (background)
...wanted friendly land between Egypt and their enemies...	Explains the cause (a buffer)
King Ahmose I drove the Hyksos out (c. 1570 BCE)...	Uses a named king and a date
This expansion had big results.	Signals the switch to consequences
Egypt gained land and wealth...	Names a consequence
But it also brought Egypt into conflict with the Hittites.	Names another consequence
...and finally to the first written peace treaty.	Ends with a long-term consequence

Notice the pattern: it gives a cause, explains it, then moves to consequences - and it uses dates and named people throughout.

A model answer paragraph about why Egypt built an empire and its results, with a breakdown showing the topic sentence, use of evidence, explanation of a cause, named king and date, and the switch to consequences.

Practice questions

Practice with help

Q1. Look at the map (Figure 2e_map). Name three societies or places Egypt had trade or contact with.

- Q2.** According to the goods table (Figure 2e_goods), which island supplied Egypt with copper?
- Q3.** The Uluburun shipwreck is a primary source. Give two items from its cargo.
- Q4.** Who were the two kings at the Battle of Kadesh, and in what year was it fought?
- Q5.** Figure 2e_kadesh shows two claims about Kadesh. In one sentence, say what the Egyptians claimed.
- Q6.** Name two things that make the treaty of about 1259 BCE special.
- Q7.** Give one **cause** of the rise of the Egyptian Empire, using the chart (Figure 2e_empire).

Practice on your own

- Q8.** Explain how the Uluburun shipwreck shows that Egypt was part of a wide trading world. Use at least two details from its cargo.
- Q9.** Explain why historians say the result of the Battle of Kadesh is contested. Use both sides' claims in your answer.
- Q10.** Analyse what caused the Egyptian Empire to rise and expand. Give at least two causes and link each to the Hyksos invasion or the wish for wealth and safety.
- Q11.** Analyse the consequences of the expansion of the Egyptian Empire. Give at least two consequences, and end with the long-term one that involves the Hittites.

Source inquiry (extended task)

Task: You are the historian. Use Figure 2e_kadesh. (a) The Egyptian account and the Hittite account disagree. List one thing each side claims. (b) Give one reason we should be careful with the Egyptian account. (c) Suggest one extra piece of evidence that would help you decide what really happened at Kadesh.

Answers

Q1. Any three of: Cyprus, Crete (the Minoans), Mycenaean Greece, the Levant (Syria-Canaan), the Hittite Empire (Anatolia).

Q2. Cyprus.

Q3. Any two of: copper ingots (about 348, about 10 tonnes), tin ingots (120), jars of resin, ebony logs, an elephant tusk (ivory), glass ingots, beads.

Q4. Rameses II of Egypt and Muwatalli II of the Hittites, in 1274 BCE.

Q5. The Egyptians claimed that Rameses II had beaten (routed) his enemies.

Q6. Any two of: it is the oldest written peace treaty we still have; both sides' copies survive and match; a copy hangs at the United Nations.

Q7. Any one of: the Hyksos had ruled part of Egypt, showing it could be invaded; Ahmose I forced them out and began expanding the borders; rulers wanted buffer zones of friendly land; Egypt wanted wealth such as gold and control of trade routes.

Q8. The ship carried goods from many places at once - copper from Cyprus, tin from far away, ivory and ebony from the south, glass and beads - and was heading toward the Greek mainland. This shows goods moved in a connected network that reached Egypt, so Egypt was part of a wide trading world, not cut off.

Q9. The Egyptian carvings say Rameses won, but they were made by the Egyptians to praise him. The Hittite records say the opposite - that Rameses left in defeat. Because each side gives its own proud version, historians cannot simply take one as true; they call it a draw, and Trevor Bryce says Egypt won the fighting but the Hittites kept Kadesh.

Q10. Cause 1: the Hyksos invasion taught Egypt it could be attacked, so its kings wanted buffer zones of friendly land for safety, which led them to expand and take control of the Levant. Cause 2: Egypt wanted wealth, such as gold and control of trade routes, which pulled it outward. Both causes connect to the expansion that made it an empire.

Q11. Consequence 1: Egypt gained land, power and wealth, joining the great powers of the age. Consequence 2: expansion brought it into conflict with the Hittites over the Levant. Long-term: that conflict led to the Battle of Kadesh and then to the first written peace treaty.

Source inquiry - guidance

- (a) Egypt claims Rameses routed his enemies; the Hittites claim Rameses left in defeat. (b) The Egyptian account was carved by the Egyptians to praise their own king, so it is one-sided. (c) Any sensible extra evidence, e.g. weapons or a destruction layer found at the site by archaeologists, or records from a neutral third state. Marks are for clear reasoning, not for one "right" answer.

Significant individuals and groups who changed ancient Egypt

Curriculum focus: content description VC2HH8K1 7. This section teaches the Egypt elaborations .E03 and .E04. The other elaboration ids on this code (.E01, .E02, .E05–.E10, for China, Greece, India and Rome) are linkage keys for the depth topics this book did not choose, and are not taught here.

Teaching sequence

What does “significant” mean?

The curriculum asks about *significant* individuals and groups, but it never defines the word *significant*. So this section states exactly how it is used here: a person or group is **significant** if they left a big, lasting mark on many people’s lives. It is a judgement, not a fixed fact, and we make it using **criteria** — a checklist we can point to and defend. Two historians can look at the same person and disagree about how significant they were, because they weigh the criteria in different ways. That disagreement is healthy: the criteria mean each person has to explain *why*, so their judgement can be tested. One more thing — significant does not only mean “good”. A person can be significant for the harm they caused as well as for the good they did. The criteria in the figure below are the ones this book uses, and they are the same ones Section 6C uses to study significance in detail.

How do we decide if someone is ‘significant’?

‘Significant’ does not just mean ‘famous’. Historians judge it using criteria like these.



Why we use criteria

‘Significant’ is a judgement, not a fixed fact. There is no single right answer. Two historians can study the same person and reach different conclusions, because they weigh the criteria differently.

That is not a problem - it is how history works. The criteria let each person explain and defend their judgement, so others can test it.

You will use these criteria in Worked example 1 to judge Hatshepsut’s achievements, and again in Section 6C, which looks at historical significance in detail.

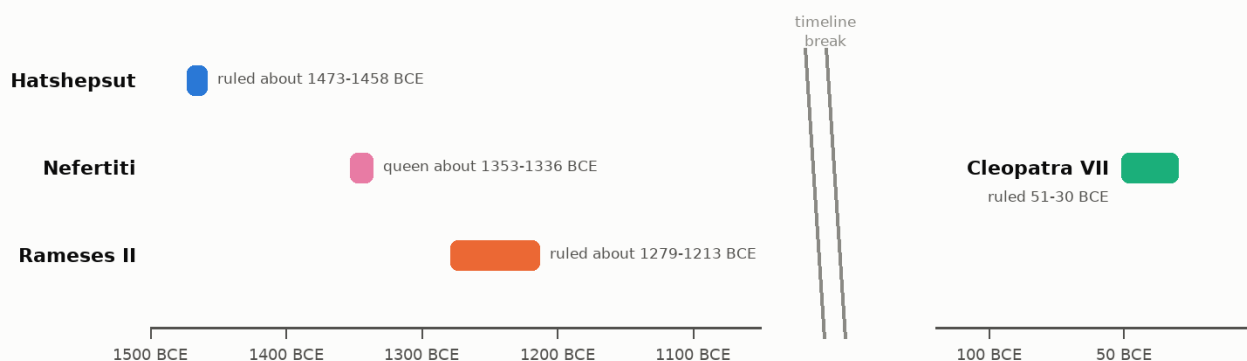
A concept map showing six criteria for judging historical significance: power, change, reach, time, evidence and memory, each with a short question, plus a note that significance is a judgement people can disagree about.

Meet the four people you can study

This section looks at four real people from ancient Egypt. Three of them lived in the **New Kingdom** (about 1550 to 1070 BCE), the period when Egypt was at its richest and most powerful. The fourth, Cleopatra VII, lived more than a thousand years later, right at the end of ancient Egypt’s independence. A **pharaoh** was the ruler of Egypt. A **dynasty** is a line of rulers from the same family. The timeline shows when each person lived, and it carries a break because Cleopatra is so far away in time from the other three.

When did they live?

Three of the four ruled in the New Kingdom. Cleopatra ruled about 1,150 years after them.



The break means a very long stretch of time has been left out. Ramses II died around 1213 BCE and Cleopatra came to the throne in 51 BCE - roughly 1,150 years apart. They lived in very different Egypts.

Reading a timeline: the space between two people shows how much time passed between them.

A horizontal timeline with a break, showing Hatshepsut, Nefertiti and Ramses II in the New Kingdom and Cleopatra VII about 1,150 years later, with dates for each.

Even as rulers changed, much continued: the Nile still flooded each year, Egyptians still honoured their gods, and scribes still kept the records. Historians always look for both — what changed, and what stayed the same. Here are the four people on one page, so you can compare them and choose who to study.

The four people you can study

All four changed Egypt, but in different ways and in different periods.

Who	When	Their role	The change they drove	Evidence we use today
Hatshepsut	ruled about 1473-1458 BCE	female pharaoh, 18th Dynasty	restarted trade (a famous expedition to Punt) and built the great temple at Deir el-Bahari	her temple, statues and carvings; records of the Punt trip
Nefertiti	about 1353-1336 BCE	Great Royal Wife beside Akhenaten	helped drive the switch to worship of the Aten, the sun disc	her famous painted bust; carvings from the city of Amarna
Ramses II	ruled about 1279-1213 BCE	pharaoh, 19th Dynasty; one of the longest rulers	a huge building program (Abu Simbel, the Ramesseum) and a peace treaty with the Hittites	his temples and colossal statues; the treaty text
Cleopatra VII	ruled 51-30 BCE	last active pharaoh, Ptolemaic Dynasty	kept Egypt independent as long as she could; after her death Rome took control	coins and carvings from her time; writings from then and after

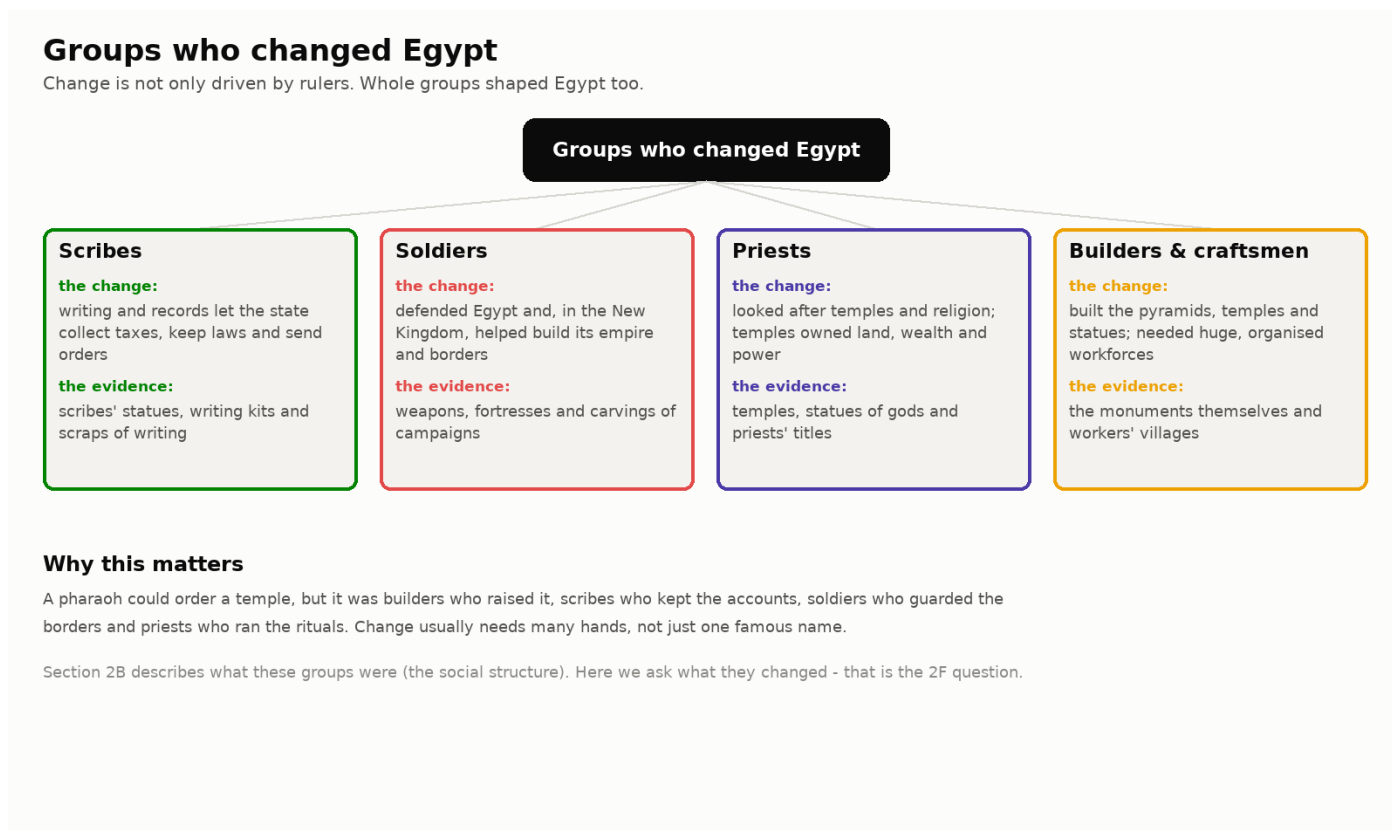
Use this table to start. Pick the person you want to study, then dig deeper for your biography.

A comparison table of Hatshepsut, Nefertiti, Ramses II and Cleopatra VII with columns for when they lived, their role, the change they made, and the evidence we use today.

Groups changed Egypt too

Change is rarely made by one famous person on their own. A pharaoh could order a temple, but it was builders who raised it, **scribes** (trained writers who kept the records) who counted the stone and the grain, soldiers who guarded the

site, and **priests** who ran the rituals. So as well as individuals, we look at groups as agents of change. This is different from Section 2B, which describes what these groups *were* (the social structure). Here the question is what they *changed*.



A concept map showing four groups who changed Egypt - scribes, soldiers, priests, and builders and craftsmen - each with the change they made and the evidence we use.

How to evaluate an achievement

Elaboration .E03 asks you to examine a person in three parts — the world they lived in, their life's work, and how the people of their own time saw them (their **contemporaries**). You will use questions and criteria to do it. The tool below gives you the shape: five questions to investigate, then six criteria to judge with. First you gather what happened; then you weigh it.

Evaluate an achievement: questions + criteria

First ask the questions. Then use the criteria to make a judgement you can defend.

1. Questions to investigate

- Context** What was Egypt like when this person lived?
- Early life** Where did they come from, and how did they get to power?
- Achievements** What did they actually do or change?
- Then** How did people who lived at the same time see them?
- After** What happened to their story and their memory later?

These five questions give your investigation its shape.

2. Criteria to judge significance

- Power**
How much could they act?
- Change**
How much changed because of them?
- Reach**
How many people were affected?
- Time**
Did the change last?
- Evidence**
How much is left to study?
- Memory**
How are they remembered?

Weigh the criteria - some will matter more than others for your person.

Worked example 1 walks through both halves of this tool using Hatshepsut.

A two-panel tool. Left: five questions to investigate (context, early life, achievements, how they were seen then, and what happened to their memory after). Right: six criteria to judge significance (power, change, reach, time, evidence, memory).

How to write a biography

Elaboration .E04 asks you to create a **biography** — a written account of a person's life. A good biography is built from evidence, not made up. It follows a clear shape, from a hook that makes us care, through context, early life and achievements, to how the person was seen and why they matter. Every claim should come from a source you can name, and where the sources disagree or are uncertain, you say so — that is honest history.

The parts of a good biography

Build your biography in this order. Each part has a job to do.

1 Hook
Who is this person, and why should we care? One or two sentences that make the reader want to know more.



2 Context
What was Egypt like when they lived? Set the scene - the period, the rulers, the beliefs.



3 Early life
Where did they come from? How did they get to power?



4 Achievements
The main body. What did they do and change? Give specific, dated examples.



5 How they were seen
By people at the time, and by people after. Has their memory changed?



6 Significance
Your judgement. Use the criteria (Figure: 'How do we decide...') and say why this person mattered.

Worked example 2 shows these parts filled in for Rameses II.

Keep it true

A biography is built from evidence, not made up.

Every claim about your person should come from a source you can name.

If sources disagree, say so.

If something is uncertain, say that too - that is honest history.

Use dates and real names.

A scaffold showing the six parts of a good biography in order - hook, context, early life, achievements, how they were seen, and significance - with a side note that a biography must stay true to the evidence.

Worked examples

Worked example 1 — with help: examining Hatshepsut with questions and criteria

We use the tool from the criteria figure, and the fact file below, to examine **Hatshepsut**.

Hatshepsut

female pharaoh of the 18th Dynasty - ruled about 1473 to 1458 BCE

Early life and rise to power

- Daughter of the pharaoh Thutmose I.
- She married her half-brother, Thutmose II.
- When he died, his heir (her stepson Thutmose III) was still a young child.
- At first she ruled as regent - a person who rules for a child who is too young to rule. Then she took the full title of pharaoh herself.

What she did - her achievements

- Sent a large trade expedition to the land of Punt. It came back with gold, ebony, ivory and live myrrh trees.
- Built and repaired temples and monuments across Egypt.
- Her greatest building was her own mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahari, named Djoser-Djeseru.
- Her rule brought wealth and stability - a time Egypt benefited from.

How she was seen - then and after

- In her own time she ruled as a full pharaoh. Statues show her wearing the royal symbols of power, even the false beard pharaohs wore.
- After her death, someone ordered her name and her face to be chiselled off the stone - an attempt to wipe her from memory.
- Historians still disagree about who ordered this, when it happened, and why. That disagreement is part of her story.

Evidence we use: her temple at Deir el-Bahari, her statues, and the carved story of the Punt trip on her temple walls.

A fact file for Hatshepsut with three panels: early life and rise to power; what she did and her achievements; and how she was seen then and after, plus the evidence we use.

Step	Working	Comment
1. Context	Egypt was in the New Kingdom, a rich and powerful period. Rulers were expected to build temples and keep trade going.	Sets the scene before we judge her.
2. Early life	Daughter of Thutmose I; married Thutmose II. When he died, her stepson was a young child, so she first ruled as regent (a person who rules for a child) and then took the full title of pharaoh.	A woman ruling as pharaoh was unusual, which makes her story notable.
3. Achievements	She sent a famous trade expedition (an organised journey) to the land of Punt, and built the great temple at Deir el-Bahari.	Specific, dated things she did - not just "she was great".
4. How she was seen then	In her own time she ruled as a full pharaoh, shown in statues with the royal symbols of power.	Her contemporaries had to treat her as the ruler.
5. How she was seen after	After her death, someone had her name and face chiselled off the stone - an attempt to erase her from memory.	Her memory changed sharply after her death.

Step	Working	Comment
6. Judge with criteria	Change and reach: her trade and building changed Egypt and touched many lives. Time: her buildings still stand. Memory: her erasure shows how contested she was.	Weighing criteria, she clearly left a big, lasting mark - she is significant.

Notice the shape: facts first (steps 1–5), judgement last (step 6). The judgement is only as strong as the facts behind it.

Worked example 2 — with help: a model biography of Rameses II

Now we fill in the six-part biography scaffold using the fact file below. This is a model you can copy the *shape* of for your own person.

Rameses II - 'the Great'

pharaoh of the 19th Dynasty - ruled about 1279 to 1213 BCE (about 66 years)

Early life and rise to power

- Son of the pharaoh Seti I and grandson of Rameses I, who founded the 19th Dynasty.
- He was given important jobs while still young and became pharaoh in his early twenties.

What he did - his achievements

- Ruled for about 66 years - one of the longest reigns in Egypt's history.
- Ran a huge building program: the great temples of Abu Simbel, his mortuary temple (the Ramesseum), and new work at Karnak and Luxor.
- Built a new capital city, Pi-Ramesses.
- After a big battle at Kadesh against the Hittites, he agreed one of the first peace treaties we know of. (The battle and the treaty are studied in Section 2E.)

How he was seen - then and after

- In his own time he was celebrated as a great warrior and builder, and he put his name and statues everywhere so people would not forget him.
- Later writers called him 'the Great', and today he is one of the best known pharaohs of all.

Evidence we use: his temples (especially Abu Simbel), his colossal statues, and the written peace treaty.

A fact file for Rameses II with three panels: early life and rise to power; what he did and his achievements; and how he was seen then and after, plus the evidence we use.

Rameses II (model biography)

Hook. Few rulers in history have left as many statues, temples and names carved in stone as Rameses II.

Context. He ruled in the New Kingdom, when Egypt was a great power with neighbours it had to fight and deal with, like the Hittites.

Early life. He was the son of the pharaoh Seti I and became pharaoh in his early twenties.

Achievements. He ruled for about 66 years, one of the longest reigns in Egypt's history. He built the great temples of Abu Simbel and his own mortuary temple, the Ramesseum, and founded a new capital, Pi-Ramesses. After a big battle at Kadesh he agreed one of the first peace treaties we know of.

How he was seen. In his own time he was celebrated as a great warrior and builder. Later writers called him "the Great", and he is still one of the best-known pharaohs today.

Significance. By the criteria, Rameses II scores highly on change, reach and time: his building program reshaped Egypt, and much of it still stands. That is a big, lasting mark.

Two things to copy. First, every sentence rests on the fact file (the evidence) - nothing is invented. Second, the last part makes a *judgement* using the criteria, rather than just repeating the facts.

Practice questions

Practice with help

- Q1.** Using the timeline figure, put the four people in order, from first to last. Who is separated from the other three by the timeline break?
- Q2.** Using the timeline figure, which of the four ruled for the longest time? Use the dates to support your answer.
- Q3.** Using the four-rulers table, match each person to the change they made: (a) kept Egypt independent until Rome took over; (b) helped drive the worship of the Aten; (c) restarted trade and built the temple at Deir el-Bahari; (d) ran a huge building program and made a peace treaty.
- Q4.** Using the groups figure, name the group whose change was “writing and records let the state collect taxes, keep laws and send orders”. Give one piece of evidence we use to know about this group.
- Q5.** Choose one of the six significance criteria. Use it to make one point about Hatshepsut, and give the evidence from her fact file that supports it.
- Q6.** Look at the “Evidence we use today” column of the four-rulers table. Which of these items were made by people who lived at the time (primary sources)? Explain your reasoning in one sentence.

Practice on your own

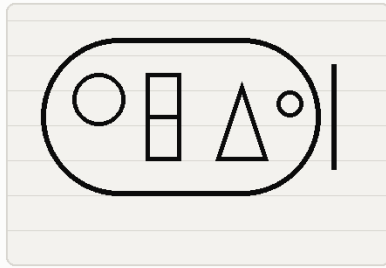
- Q7.** Was Nefertiti significant? Use at least three of the six criteria and give evidence for each. Where your evidence is thin, say so.
- Q8.** Compare Hatshepsut and Cleopatra VII as change-makers. Give one way their impact was similar and one way it was different, and explain why the difference matters.
- Q9.** “An individual changes a society more than any group can.” Do you agree? Argue your case using at least one individual and one group from this section. Then give the strongest argument for the other side.
- Q10.** Write a full biography of one person from this section (or another ancient Egyptian you have researched), following the six-part scaffold. Include at least one place where the sources disagree or are uncertain, and say so honestly.
-

Source-based inquiry task

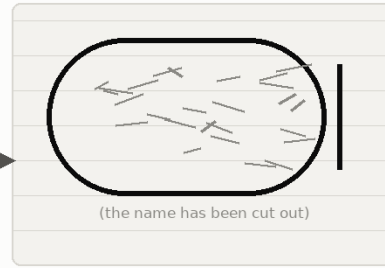
Look at Source A below. It is an original reconstruction we drew for this book - not a photograph - showing what a royal name-ring (**cartouche**) looked like before and after it was chiselled away.

Source A - an erased name (before and after)

An original reconstruction we drew for this book - not a photograph of a real carving.



BEFORE: the name is intact



AFTER: the name is chiselled away

After Hatshepsut died, someone ordered her royal names and her face to be cut off the stone. A pharaoh's name was written inside a ring like this, called a cartouche. Erasing the name was a way of trying to erase the person from memory.

Inquiry: use Source A and what you have read to work out what happened to Hatshepsut's memory, and why someone might have done it.

Remember: historians still argue about who ordered the erasing, when it happened, and why. Keep your answer honest about what we know and what we are only guessing at.

A before and after reconstruction of a royal name-ring, called a cartouche. The left panel shows simple shapes standing in for hieroglyphs inside an intact ring; the right panel shows the same ring with the shapes chiselled away.

Inquiry. After Hatshepsut died, many of her names and images were cut off the stone. Use Source A and what you have read in this section to answer:

1. What does Source A show happened to Hatshepsut's memory after her death?
2. Suggest two different reasons why someone might have ordered the erasing. (Remember that historians still argue about who did it, when, and why.)
3. For each of your two reasons, say whether it is something we know from evidence, or something we are only guessing at. Explain the difference.

Answers

Q1. Hatshepsut, then Nefertiti, then Rameses II, then (after the break) Cleopatra VII. Cleopatra is separated by the break - she lived about 1,150 years after the others. **Q2.** Rameses II. His dates 1279–1213 BCE give about 66 years, longer than Hatshepsut (about 15–22 years), Nefertiti's time as queen (about 17 years) or Cleopatra (21 years). **Q3.** (a) Cleopatra VII; (b) Nefertiti; (c) Hatshepsut; (d) Rameses II. **Q4.** The scribes. Evidence: scribes' statues, writing kits, or scraps of their writing. **Q5.** Any one criterion with matching evidence. Example - *time*: her temple at Deir el-Bahari still stands today, so her mark lasted. Example - *memory*: her name was later erased, showing how contested her memory was. **Q6.** Items made at the time count as primary: the temples, statues, carvings, coins and the treaty text, because they were produced by the people who lived then. A writing *about* the person made later is not primary.

Q7. Indicative. A good answer uses three criteria with evidence, and admits where evidence is thin. Example: *memory* (her bust is world-famous, so her memory is strong today); *change* (she helped drive the switch to worshipping the Aten, a big religious change); but *power/reach* is harder to prove because sources are thin - a strong answer says that uncertainty out loud. **Q8. Indicative.** Similar: both were women who held real power at the top of Egypt and left buildings or records behind. Different: Hatshepsut's rule kept Egypt prosperous from within, while Cleopatra's story ends with Egypt losing its independence to Rome - so Cleopatra is significant in part for how her reign *ended* an era. **Q9. Indicative.** Either side is defensible if evidenced. A strong answer argues one side (e.g. Rameses II's building program changed the landscape) then states the strongest case for the other side (e.g. no pharaoh's plan works without scribes, builders and soldiers, so groups made the change). **Q10. Indicative.** Check the six parts are present in order, claims rest on named evidence, and at least one uncertainty is stated honestly (e.g. who erased Hatshepsut's name, or whether Nefertiti ruled as pharaoh). **Inquiry. Indicative.** (1) Her name and face were cut away - an attempt to erase her from memory. (2) Two possible reasons, e.g. to remove the memory of a woman ruling as pharaoh, or a later ruler clearing rivals' names to strengthen his own claim. (3) The key skill: stating which parts are evidence (the erasing actually happened) and which are a guess (the *motive*), and explaining that we can see the chisel marks but not the reasons behind them.

What Egypt left behind: legacies and changing interpretations

Ancient Egypt ended as a kingdom more than 2,000 years ago, yet it still reaches us. Our word “paper” comes from its writing sheets; a pyramid-shaped tomb from c. 12 BCE still stands in Rome; and in 2017 scientists used particles from space to find a hidden space inside the Great Pyramid. In this section we do two jobs historians do. We weigh what Egypt left behind — its legacies. And we track how people’s readings of one site, the Great Pyramid, changed over 2,500 years as new evidence came in. Then we test one genuinely contested claim: how much did Egypt shape Greece and Rome?

Curriculum record — VC2HH8K18, teaching .E03 (weighing what Egypt left behind — papyrus, brewing, and how Egypt shaped Greece and Rome) and .E04 (one site — the Great Pyramids — and how readings of its significance changed over time as new evidence came in). **The other elaboration ids under this CD (.E01–.E02, .E05–.E10) name the other menu societies (China, Greece, India, Rome). They are linkage keys only and are not taught here — this book’s depth study is Egypt (see the TOC, §2).**

Theory

Teaching sequence (for the teacher) 1. Teach the key words below with the legacy map and the frame card. Keep “significant” and “legacy” as judgement words that need a frame before they are used in an argument. 2. Build the legacy strand from the three legacy cards (papyrus, brewery, contact timeline). Students copy six dated facts into their books. 3. Run the borrowing debate (Bernal vs Lefkowitz) as two readings of the same facts. Put each side at its strongest; score the reasons, not the side (Worked example 2). 4. Build the site strand: the numbers card, then the nine-readings timeline. Ask each time: what new kind of evidence moved the reading? 5. Use the evidence-shift card (slaves to work crews) as the model case of an interpretation changing. Anchor it with Merer’s diary as the primary source. 6. Close with the inquiry task (Q11) on the planner. Assess the frame, the named evidence and the handling of the other side — not the verdict.

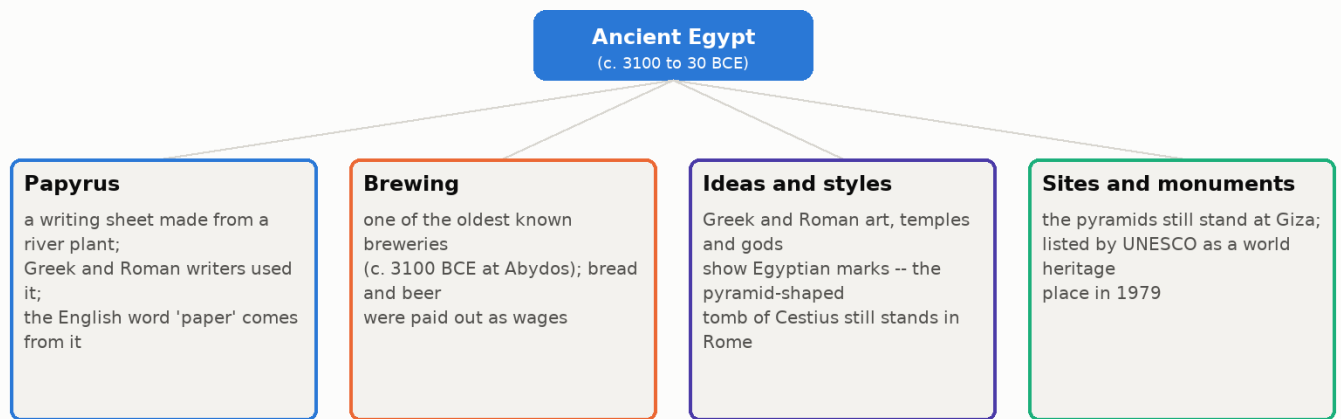
Key words

- **interpretation** — a reading of what the facts mean, or why they matter. The same facts can carry two interpretations.
- **significance** — how much something mattered, and to whom. It is a judgement word, so it needs a frame (the frame card) before it can be argued.
- **legacy** — what survives a society and still reaches later times: a thing, a skill, an idea picked up by others, or a place that still stands.
- **archaeologist** — a person who studies the past by digging up and examining the things people left behind.
- **historian** — a person who studies the past, especially from written records.
- **primary source** — a record made at the time, by someone who was there. Merer’s diary and the Rosetta decree are primary sources.
- **secondary source** — a later account built from primary sources. Herodotus writing about the pyramid 2,000 years after it was built is a secondary source for the building.
- **contested** — openly argued about. A contested claim is one thoughtful people can disagree about, with evidence on both sides.

What is left of ancient Egypt?

What is left of ancient Egypt?

A legacy is what survives a society and still reaches later times. Here are four of Egypt's.



Each branch is a different kind of legacy: a thing (papyrus), a skill (brewing), ideas picked up by other societies, and places that still stand.

Chart made for this book. Dates and facts are drawn from the sources listed at the end of this section.

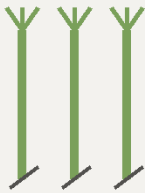
Hub-and-spoke legacy map: “Ancient Egypt (c. 3100 to 30 BCE)” at the top, with four branches — Papyrus, Brewing, Ideas and styles, and Sites and monuments — each with a short note, and a caption saying each branch is a different kind of legacy

The map sorts Egypt’s legacies into four kinds: a thing (papyrus), a skill (brewing), ideas picked up by other societies, and places that still stand. A legacy is not just “something old”. It is something that kept travelling through time after the society itself ended.

How an Egyptian writing sheet was made from the papyrus plant

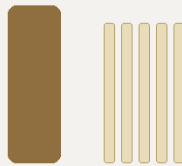
Six steps, from a river plant to a sheet you can write on.

1 Cut the plant



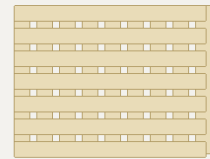
The papyrus plant grew thick along the River Nile.

2 Slice the pith



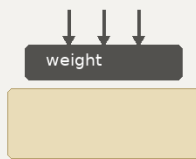
peel and slice
The soft inner part was cut into thin strips.

3 Lay strips crossing



One layer one way, the next layer across it.

4 Beat and press



While wet, the strips were pressed so they stuck together.

5 Dry it flat



The sheet dried under weight, kept flat and smooth.

6 Roll and write



Sheets were joined into rolls. Scribes wrote on them in ink.

Diagram made for this book. Method follows how papyrus sheets were made in ancient Egypt; the English word 'paper' comes from 'papyrus'.

Six-step diagram of how an Egyptian writing sheet was made from the papyrus plant: cut the plant, slice the pith, lay strips crossing, beat and press, dry it flat, roll and write

Papyrus grew thick along the River Nile. Egyptians cut it, sliced the soft pith into strips, laid one layer one way and the next across it, then beat and pressed it while wet so the strips stuck, dried it flat, and joined sheets into rolls. It was Egypt's great writing technology, and one of its longest-lived legacies: Greek and Roman writers used it for hundreds of years, and the English word "paper" comes from "papyrus". The oldest written papyri we have are Egyptian logbooks from c. 2560–2550 BCE, found at Wadi al-Jarf, a Red Sea harbour — more on them below.

Source card: the world's oldest known big brewery

Announced in February 2021 by an Egyptian-American dig team at Abydos, an early royal burial place in southern Egypt.

When

about 3100 BCE -- the reign of King Narmer, one of Egypt's first kings

Who found it

a joint Egyptian-American team led by archaeologist Matthew Adams

What was found

six long rows of clay vats used to heat a beer mix

How much beer

about 22,400 litres in one batch -- enough for tens of thousands of cups

Why it was brewed

for feasts honouring the early kings buried nearby

Beer was more than a drink.

In ancient Egypt, beer and bread were everyday food -- and a way to pay people. Workers on big state projects were paid in bread and beer.

Card made for this book. Figures are from the 2021 announcement; see the sources at the end of this section.

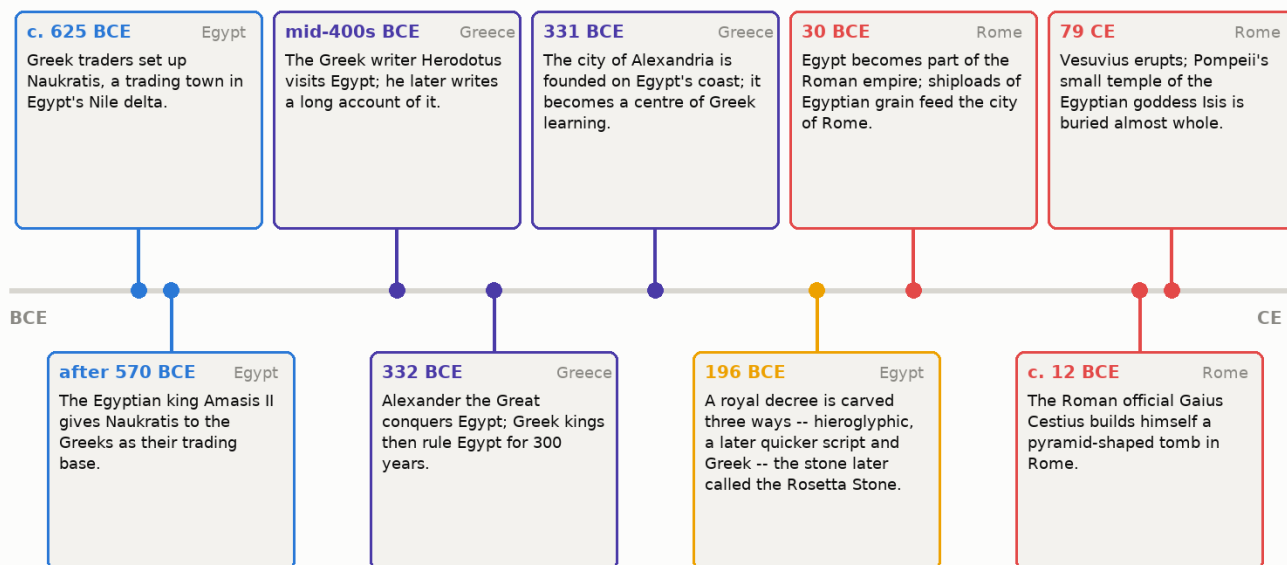
Source card for the world's oldest known big brewery, announced in February 2021 at Abydos: when (about 3100 BCE, reign of King Narmer), who found it (a joint Egyptian-American team led by archaeologist Matthew Adams), what was found (six long rows of clay vats), how much beer (about 22,400 litres in one batch), and why it was brewed (for feasts honouring the early kings buried nearby), with a note that beer and bread were also paid out as wages

In February 2021 an Egyptian-American dig team led by archaeologist Matthew Adams announced one of the oldest known big breweries in the world, at Abydos in southern Egypt, from about 3100 BCE — the reign of Narmer, one of Egypt's first kings. Its rows of clay vats could make about 22,400 litres of beer in one batch, for feasts honouring the early kings buried nearby. Beer was more than a drink: in ancient Egypt, bread and beer were everyday food and a way to pay people. Workers on big state projects were paid out in bread and beer. Brewing at that scale, that early, is a legacy of organised Egypt.

Legacy 3 — ideas that travelled: Egypt meets Greece, then Rome

Egypt meets Greece, then Rome

Nine dated moments when people, goods and ideas moved between Egypt, Greece and Rome.



Note: the spacing is to help reading, not to scale. Every date is a real, dated moment from the sources listed at the end of this section. Colour shows where the moment happened: blue = Egypt, violet = the Greek world, yellow = both, red = Rome.

Timeline of nine dated moments of contact between Egypt, Greece and Rome, from c. 625 BCE (Greek traders set up Naukratis) to 79 CE (Vesuvius buries Pompeii's temple of the Egyptian goddess Isis), colour-coded by where the moment happened

The timeline shows real, dated contact. Around 625 BCE Greek traders set up Naukratis, a trading town in the Nile delta; after 570 BCE the Egyptian king Amasis II (ruled 570–526 BCE) gave it to the Greeks as their trading base, swapping Egyptian grain, linen and papyrus for silver, timber, olive oil and wine. In the mid-400s BCE the Greek writer Herodotus visited Egypt and later wrote a long account of it. Alexander the Great took Egypt in 332 BCE; a year later the city of Alexandria was founded on the coast and became a centre of Greek learning. In 196 BCE a royal decree was carved three ways — in hieroglyphic, the old picture script, in a later, quicker Egyptian script, and in Greek — on the stone we now call the Rosetta Stone. From 30 BCE Egypt was part of the Roman empire; the city of Rome got its food in shiploads of Egyptian grain. Egyptian religion travelled too: Pompeii had a small temple of the Egyptian goddess Isis, buried by Vesuvius in 79 CE. And in Rome, the official Gaius Cestius was buried in a pyramid-shaped tomb (c. 18–12 BCE) that still stands.

A contested claim: how much did Greece borrow from Egypt?

The contact on that timeline is fact. What it adds up to is contested. In 1987 Martin Bernal published *Black Athena*, arguing that ancient Greece owed a great debt to Egypt — in religion, art and ideas. In 1996 Mary Lefkowitz answered with *Not Out of Africa*, arguing that the debt was much smaller than Bernal claimed. The curriculum does not settle this debate; it is a live argument between scholars. Here is each side at its strongest.

Bernal, at his strongest. The Greeks themselves said the debt was real: Herodotus wrote (Histories 2.50) that the names of the Greek gods came from Egypt. For centuries an Egyptian trading town sat in the delta, and early Greek standing statues and temple styles look strongly Egyptian. If the Greeks borrowed goods and styles for hundreds of years, it is hard to believe no ideas travelled with them.

Lefkowitz, at her strongest. Borrowing styles and goods is not the same as borrowing ideas. Greek ways of arguing, questioning and governing grew out of Greek life, from Greek problems. And some of Bernal's evidence is weak: writers who claimed big Egyptian debts wrote long after the events, when such claims were fashionable.

Both sides use the same facts (Naukratis, Herodotus, the statues). They disagree about what the facts add up to — which is exactly what a contested claim is. Notice the skill: we can say which reading we find stronger, with reasons, without pretending the other side is silly.

The site strand: the Great Pyramid, by the numbers

The Great Pyramid at Giza: the numbers

Built as the tomb of the pharaoh Khufu, about 4,600 years ago.



Built for

Khufu, a pharaoh of Egypt's 4th dynasty

When

c. 2600 BCE; the work took about 26 years

Height

146.6 metres when new; 138.5 metres today

Base

about 230 metres along each side

Stones

about 2.3 million blocks, roughly 6 million tonnes in all

Stone sources

white casing stone from Tura; granite from Aswan, some blocks up to 80 tonnes

World heritage

listed by UNESCO in 1979 with the other pyramid fields (criteria i, iii and vi)

Diagram made for this book. All figures come from the sources listed at the end of this section.

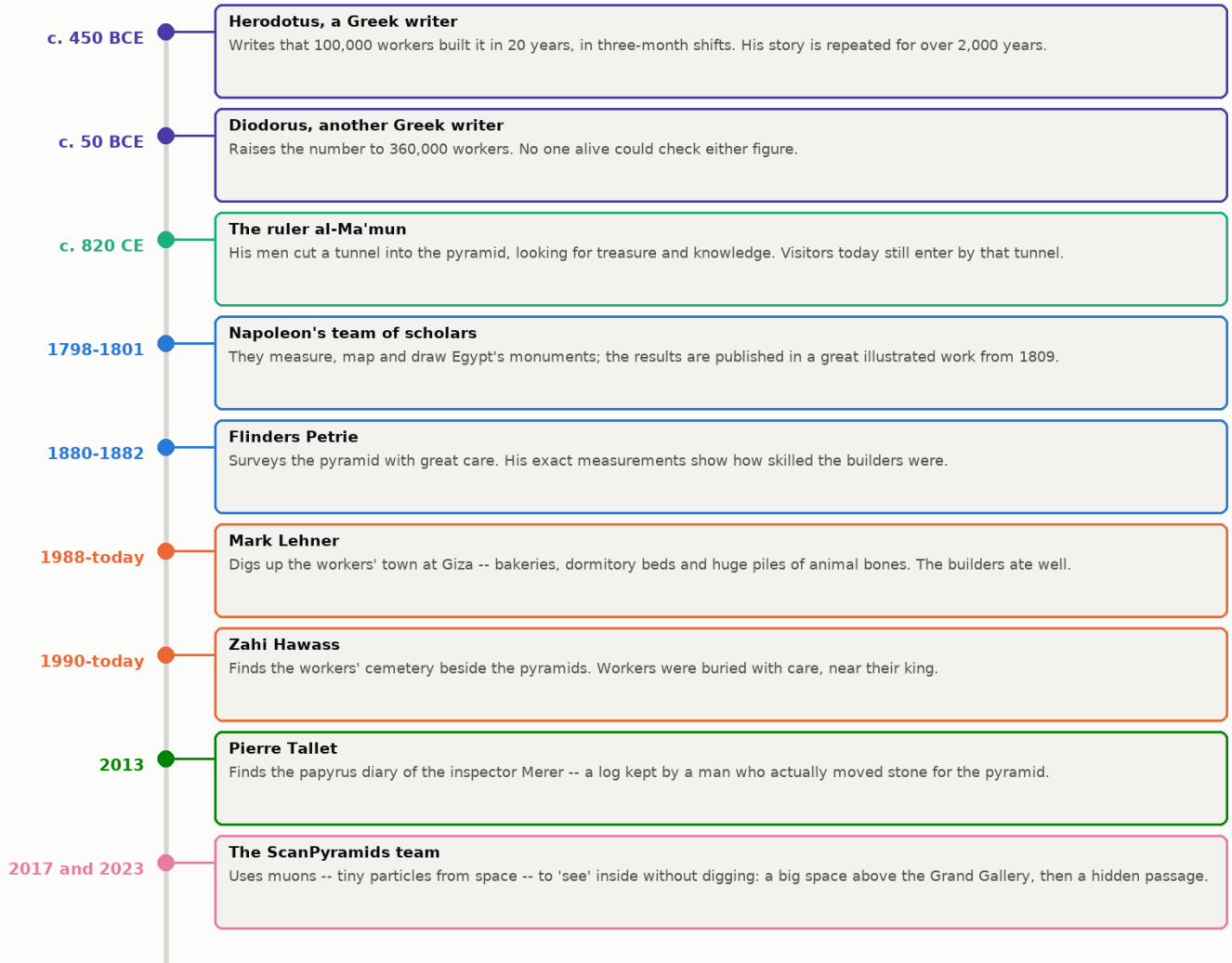
Stat card for the Great Pyramid at Giza: built for Khufu of the 4th dynasty, c. 2600 BCE, about 26 years of work; 146.6 metres when new and 138.5 metres today; base about 230 metres a side; about 2.3 million blocks, roughly 6 million tonnes; white casing stone from Tura and granite from Aswan with some blocks up to 80 tonnes; listed by UNESCO in 1979 with the other pyramid fields, criteria i, iii and vi

The Great Pyramid was built as the tomb of the pharaoh Khufu, of Egypt's 4th dynasty, around 2600 BCE. It is the site this section investigates (the curriculum's other option is a significant tomb site). It was the tallest building in the world for thousands of years. It is shorter now (138.5 m, not 146.6 m) because its smooth white casing stones were taken away over the centuries. In 1979 UNESCO listed the pyramid fields as a world heritage place — a modern judgement of their significance, using written criteria (i, iii and vi).

Nine readings across 2,500 years

The Great Pyramid: nine readings across 2,500 years

People kept asking what the pyramid meant and who built it. Their answers changed as new evidence came in.



Notice the pattern: each new kind of evidence -- digging, measuring, written logs, particle scans -- changed what the pyramid could tell people.
Chart made for this book; every entry is a real, dated reading from the sources at the end of this section.

Vertical timeline of nine readings of the Great Pyramid, from Herodotus c. 450 BCE to the ScanPyramids team in 2017 and 2023, each with a dated card saying who gave the reading and what new evidence they used

People kept asking what the pyramid meant and who built it, and their answers changed as new kinds of evidence came in: first stories written down by visitors (Herodotus, Diodorus), then treasure-hunting tunnels (al-Ma'mun, c. 820 CE), then careful measuring (Napoleon's scholars from 1798, and Petrie from 1880 to 1882), then digging (Lehner's workers' town from 1988, Hawass's workers' cemetery from 1990), then written logs from the time (Merer's diary, 2013), and finally particle scans (ScanPyramids, 2017 and 2023). The pattern is the point of VC2HH8K18.E04: the site did not change, but what archaeologists and historians could say about its significance did.

When new evidence moves an interpretation

When new evidence moves an interpretation

For over 2,000 years most people believed the pyramids were built by slaves. Then the evidence changed the reading.

The old claim

The Greek writer Herodotus, visiting about 2,500 years after the pyramid was built, wrote that 100,000 forced workers built it in three-month shifts over 20 years.

Later writers pushed the number even higher. Films and stories kept the slave picture alive right into our time.

The problem: Herodotus had no records from the builders' own time. He was passing on what he was told.

test

The new evidence

1990 Workers' graves found beside the pyramids -- people buried with care, near the king (Zahi Hawass).

1988+ The workers' town at Giza: bakeries, sleeping galleries and big piles of animal bones (Mark Lehner).

2013 Merer's diary: named crews, boat trips, stone counts and food supplies, written at the time.

1999 A study of the work itself: a steady crew of about 13,200, peaking near 40,000 -- far below 100,000.

The reading most archaeologists now give

The pyramids were built by state-organised work crews: skilled builders who worked all year, plus crews of Egyptians who came in turns, housed and given food by the state. They ate meat, bread and beer, and they were buried with respect.

This is not the same as modern paid work: some crews came because they owed labour to the state. But it is not the slave story either -- the graves, the town and the diary all say so.

Chart made for this book. This is a real case of an interpretation changing when the evidence changed. Sources are listed at the end of this section.

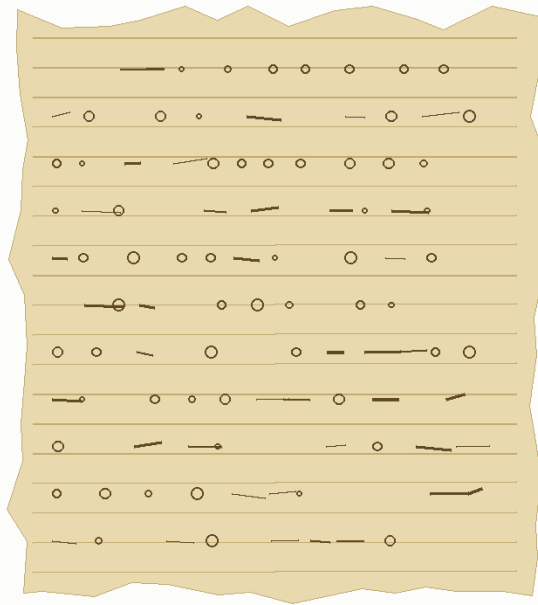
Two-panel diagram: "The old claim" (Herodotus's story of 100,000 forced workers, repeated for over 2,000 years, with no records from the builders' own time) tested against "The new evidence" (1990 workers' graves found by Zahi Hawass, the workers' town dug from 1988 by Mark Lehner, Merer's diary found in 2013, and a 1999 study of the work itself giving a steady crew of about 13,200 peaking near 40,000), leading to "The reading most archaeologists now give": state-organised work crews, not the slave story

For over 2,000 years most people repeated the slave story: 100,000 forced workers, three-month shifts, 20 years. That is what Herodotus wrote, visiting about 2,500 years after the pyramid was built, and no one alive could check it. Then the dug-up and written evidence arrived: workers' graves buried with care beside the king (Hawass, 1990); a workers' town with bakeries and big piles of animal bones (Lehner, from 1988); a 1999 construction-management study, run with Mark Lehner and other Egyptologists, that put the steady crew at about 13,200, peaking near 40,000 — far below 100,000; and Merer's diary (2013). The reading most archaeologists now give is different: the pyramids were built by state-organised work crews — skilled builders plus crews of Egyptians who came in turns, housed and given food by the state. Be careful with the reasoning here: this is not the same as modern paid work (some crews owed labour to the state), but it is not the slave story either. The graves, the town and the diary all say so. The interpretation changed because the evidence did.

Merer's diary: a primary source from the building site

Primary source card: the diary of Merer

A recreated page based on the real papyrus logbooks, the oldest written papyri known (c. 2560-2550 BCE).



The marks above are drawn to look like the ink writing of the time. They are not a real text.

Recreated for this book from the published translations. Found in 2013 at Wadi al-Jarf, a Red Sea harbour, by a French-Egyptian team led by Pierre Tallet and Gregory Marouard. The real fragments are kept by Egypt's antiquities authorities.

What the diary records (in today's words)

- Kept in year 26 and 27 of the reign of the pharaoh Khufu
- Written by, or for, Merer, an inspector in charge of a crew
- His crew moved blocks of white limestone by boat
- From the quarries of Tura, down the Nile
- To 'Akhet-Khufu' -- the Great Pyramid at Giza
- About 30 blocks per trip, each weighing 2 to 3 tonnes
- A round trip took about ten days
- Food for the crew was brought from Heliopolis

Why it matters: this is the only account we have from someone who was there while the Great Pyramid was being built.

Primary source card recreating a page of the diary of Merer: a ragged papyrus fragment with abstract ink marks beside a translation panel listing what the diary records — kept in years 26 and 27 of Khufu, crew moving about 30 limestone blocks of 2 to 3 tonnes per boat trip from Tura to Akhet-Khufu, about a ten-day round trip, food brought from Heliopolis

In 2013, at Wadi al-Jarf, a French-Egyptian team led by Pierre Tallet and Gregory Marouard found the oldest written papyri known (c. 2560–2550 BCE). Among them is the logbook kept in years 26 and 27 of Khufu's reign by, or for, Merer, an inspector in charge of a crew. His crew moved blocks of white limestone by boat from the quarries of Tura to "Akhet-Khufu" — the Great Pyramid site — about 30 blocks a trip, each 2 to 3 tonnes, with a round trip of about ten days and food brought from Heliopolis. For the building of the pyramid, this is a **primary source**: a record made at the time by someone who was there. Herodotus, by contrast, is a **secondary source** for the building — he wrote about 2,000 years later, from what he was told. Yet Herodotus is a **primary source** for something else: what Greeks of his own day believed about Egypt. One document can be primary for one question and secondary for another. That is the habit to build: always ask, a source of what?

Judgement words need a frame

Frame card: what kind of words are 'significant' and 'legacy'?

They are judgement words. People can agree on every fact about Egypt and still judge its importance differently.

1. Significant to whom?

The Egyptians of the time? The Greeks and Romans? People today? Say whose eyes you are using.

2. Compared with what?

Other societies of the same time? Other legacies? Name the thing you are weighing it against.

3. At the time, or since?

Some things mattered then and faded. Others grew in importance later. Say which kind you mean.

4. What is different because of it?

Would the world today -- or the ancient world -- really look different without it? How?

Before you argue, state your frame.

Then give reasons with evidence -- a date, a source, a place. Two people who state their frames and reason well can reach different conclusions, and both can be worth marking.

Card made for this book. The four questions are the ones historians use when they weigh how much something mattered.

Frame card asking what kind of words “significant” and “legacy” are, with four frame questions — Significant to whom? Compared with what? At the time, or since? What is different because of it? — and a closing panel: before you argue, state your frame, then give reasons with evidence

“Significant” and “legacy” are judgement words. The curriculum uses them but does not define them, so this book states an operational definition: a thing is **significant** to the extent that it changed things for people at the time, or has kept changing things since, and a **legacy** is what survives and still reaches later times. Two people can agree on every fact about Egypt and still weigh its significance in different ways — so before arguing, state your frame (to whom? compared with what? at the time, or since?), then reason with evidence. Two people who state their frames and reason well can reach different conclusions, and both can be worth marking.

Worked examples

Example 1 — with help: sorting fact from reading at the Great Pyramid

Task. For each statement, say: fact, or reading (interpretation)? Then say how you know.

Step 1 — the test. A fact can be checked against a record: a count, a date, a document, a dig. A reading is what someone says the facts mean or add up to.

Step 2 — apply the test.

Statement	Fact or reading?	How you know
Herodotus wrote that 100,000 workers built the pyramid.	Fact (about what Herodotus wrote)	Checkable in his book, the Histories
The pyramid was built by 100,000 slaves.	Reading	It is Herodotus’s claim about the building, and the new evidence (graves, town, diary, the 1999 study) reads against it
The ScanPyramids team found a hidden space above the Grand Gallery in 2017.	Fact	Checkable in the published report (Nature, 2 November 2017)

Statement	Fact or reading?	How you know
The pyramid is Egypt's most significant legacy.	Reading	"Most significant" is a judgement word; it needs a frame, and others can weigh the legacies in different ways

Step 3 — the habit. Notice the first row: "Herodotus wrote X" is a fact even when X is a reading. Always ask, a fact (or reading) *of what?*

Example 2 — with help: two readings of "Did Egypt shape Greece?" side by side

Task. Use the contact timeline and the debate notes to fill the table, then close with one model sentence.

	Reading A — Bernal: a big debt	Reading B — Lefkowitz: a smaller debt
Question asked	What did Greece receive from Egypt?	What did Greeks make for themselves?
Evidence used	Herodotus 2.50 (gods' names from Egypt); Naukratis trading for centuries; early Greek statues and temple styles look Egyptian	Greek arguing and governing grew out of Greek life; borrowing styles is not borrowing ideas; some of Bernal's sources wrote long after the events
Explains well	Why Greeks themselves claimed Egyptian roots, and why early Greek art looks Egyptian	Why Greek ways of thinking still look Greek, not Egyptian
Leaves out	How much of the borrowing was style and goods, not ideas	The depth and length of the contact, and the Greek claims of debt

Model closing sentence. The readings are contested because both sides use the same true facts (Naukratis, Herodotus, the statues) but ask different questions and weigh "ideas" against "styles" in different ways — so agreeing on the facts does not end the argument.

Practice questions

Practice with help

Q1. Fill each gap with a key word: *legacy*, *interpretation*, *primary source*, *secondary source*, *archaeologist*, *contested*.

(a) What survives a society and still reaches later times is its _____. (b) A reading of what the facts mean is an _____. (c) A record made at the time by someone who was there is a _____. (d) A later account built from earlier records is a _____. (e) A person who studies the past by digging up what people left behind is an _____. (f) A claim thoughtful people can disagree about, with evidence on both sides, is _____.

Q2. Look at the papyrus diagram. (a) Name the plant and the river it grew along. (b) Which step made the strips stick together? (c) Where are the oldest written papyri from, and from about when?

Q3. Look at the brewery card. (a) When was the brewery built, and under which king? (b) Who led the team that found it? (c) About how much beer could one batch make? (d) Which two foods were paid out as wages?

Q4. Look at the pyramid numbers card. (a) Give the height when new and the height today. (b) Why is it shorter now? (c) In what year did UNESCO list the pyramid fields, and under which criteria?

Q5. Fact or reading? Say how you know for each. (a) Merer's crew moved about 30 blocks of stone per boat trip. (b) The Great Pyramid was built by slaves. (c) In 2017 the ScanPyramids team found a big hidden space above the Grand Gallery. (d) The Great Pyramid is the most significant building of the ancient world. (e) The Rosetta decree was carved in 196 BCE.

Q6. Look at the Merer card. (a) Is the diary a primary or a secondary source for the building of the pyramid? Say why. (b) From where to where did his crew move stone? (c) Why is the diary a stronger witness than Herodotus for how the stone moved?

Practice on your own

Q7. The reading of who built the Great Pyramid changed between c. 450 BCE and 2013. Using at least three dated pieces of evidence from this section, describe how the reading changed, and explain why the new evidence carried more weight than the old story.

Q8. Pick two of Egypt's legacies from the legacy map (for example papyrus and the monuments). Use two of the frame-card questions to argue which of your two is the more significant. State your frame before you argue.

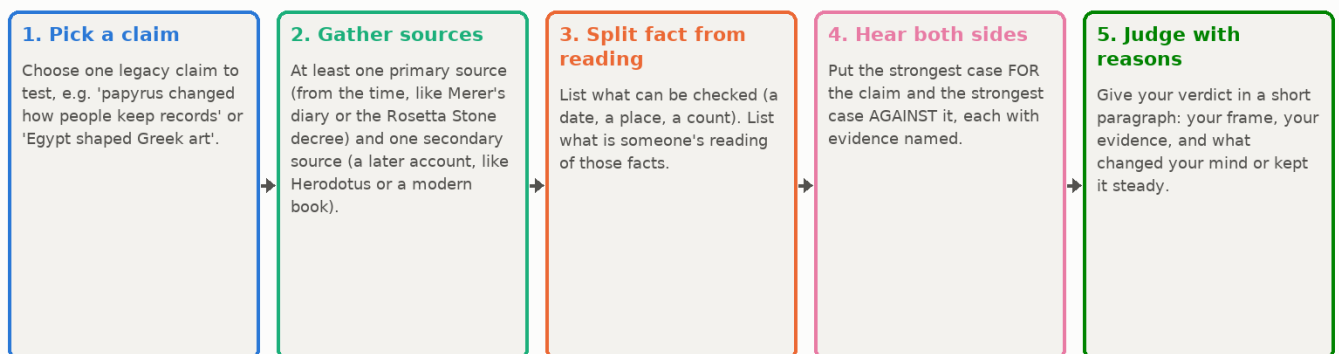
Q9. Herodotus is a secondary source for the building of the pyramids, yet he is also a primary source for something else. Explain both halves of that claim, naming what he is a source *of* in each case.

Q10. Bernal and Lefkowitz disagree about how much Greece borrowed from Egypt. (a) Name one fact both sides use. (b) Put each side at its strongest in one sentence each. (c) Say which reading you find stronger, and why — and mark clearly that you are weighing reasons, not ending the debate for all time.

Q11. Source-based inquiry task: *Does ancient Egypt's legacy still reach us today?* Plan and write a short inquiry using the five-step planner below. You must: pick one legacy claim to test; use at least one primary source from this section (for example Merer's diary or the Rosetta decree) and at least one secondary source (for example Herodotus or a modern account); split the checkable facts from the readings; put the strongest case for and against your claim; and give a verdict paragraph that states your frame, names your evidence, and says what changed your mind or kept it steady. Keep a dated list of your sources.

Plan your inquiry: does Egypt's legacy still reach us?

Five moves, in order. This is the same pattern historians follow when they test a claim.



Keep a note of every source you use, with its date, so your teacher can check it. A judgement without named evidence is only an opinion.

Flow chart made for this book.

Five-step inquiry planner: pick a claim; gather sources (at least one primary and one secondary); split fact from reading; hear both sides at their strongest; judge with reasons — with a closing note to keep a dated source list because a judgement without named evidence is only an opinion

Answers

Q1. (a) legacy (b) interpretation (c) primary source (d) secondary source (e) archaeologist (f) contested.

Q2. (a) The papyrus plant, along the River Nile. (b) Beating and pressing the strips while wet (step 4). (c) Wadi al-Jarf, a Red Sea harbour; c. 2560–2550 BCE.

Q3. (a) About 3100 BCE, under King Narmer. (b) Matthew Adams (a joint Egyptian-American team). (c) About 22,400 litres. (d) Bread and beer.

Q4. (a) 146.6 metres when new; 138.5 metres today. (b) Its smooth white casing stones were taken away over the centuries. (c) 1979, under criteria i, iii and vi.

Q5. (a) fact (b) reading (c) fact (d) reading (e) fact.

Q6. (a) Primary — made at the time, by someone doing the work. (b) From the quarries of Tura to Akhet-Khufu, the Great Pyramid site. (c) Merer was there at the time; Herodotus wrote about 2,000 years later, from what he was told.

Q7–Q10. Answers will differ. A good answer names dated evidence, states a frame where a judgement word is used, and puts the other side at its strongest — see the solutions at the end of this section for models.

Q11. Verdicts will differ. The planner's checklist is the mark scheme: claim picked, primary and secondary source named with dates, facts split from readings, both sides at their strongest, verdict with a stated frame and named evidence.

Fully-worked solutions

Solution to Q5. The rule: a **fact** can be checked against a record — a count, a date, a document, a dig. A **reading** is what someone says the facts mean or add up to. (a) Fact — checkable in Merer's diary, a record from the time. (b) Reading — it is a claim about the building; it was the old reading (Herodotus), and the graves, the workers' town, the diary and the 1999 study now read against it. (c) Fact — checkable in the published report (Nature, 2 November 2017). (d) Reading — "most significant" is a judgement word; it needs a frame, and someone else can weigh papyrus, or the idea-legacies, higher. (e) Fact — the decree itself states its date (27 March 196 BCE), and the stone is in the British Museum.

Solution to Q7 (model). For over 2,000 years the reading was Herodotus's: 100,000 forced workers in three-month shifts (c. 450 BCE), later pushed even higher by Diodorus (c. 50 BCE). The reading changed when new kinds of evidence arrived. In 1990 Zahi Hawass found workers' graves beside the pyramids — people buried with care, near the king, not discarded slaves. From 1988 Mark Lehner dug the workers' town: bakeries, sleeping places and huge piles of animal bones, showing the state gave the builders good food. In 2013 Pierre Tallet's team found Merer's diary, a log kept at the time by a man who actually moved stone. A 1999 construction-management study, run with Lehner, put the steady crew at about 13,200, peaking near 40,000 — far below 100,000. The new evidence carried more weight because it was primary or dug-up: records and things from the builders' own time, not stories written down 2,000 years later by a visitor who was told things. So the reading most archaeologists now give is state-organised work crews — not modern paid work, but not the slave story either.

Solution to Q9 (model). A source is always a source *of something*. For the building of the pyramids, Herodotus is a **secondary source**: he visited Egypt in the mid-400s BCE, about 2,000 years after Khufu's pyramid was built, had no records from the builders' own time, and passed on what he was told — so his 100,000 workers are a later account, not an eyewitness record. But for a different question — what did Greeks of the 400s BCE believe about Egypt? — his Histories are a **primary source**: a record made at the time, showing a Greek mind at work (for example his claim at Histories 2.50 that the names of the Greek gods came from Egypt). Same document, two statuses. That is why historians always ask, a source of what?

Solution to Q10 (model). (a) A fact both sides use: Naukratis — a Greek trading town in the Nile delta from c. 625 BCE (or: Herodotus wrote at 2.50 that the gods' names came from Egypt). (b) Bernal at his strongest: the Greeks themselves claimed the debt, and centuries of trade and Egyptian-looking early Greek art make a real transfer of ideas likely. Lefkowitz at her strongest: borrowing styles and goods is not borrowing ideas, Greek thinking grew out of Greek life, and some of Bernal's witnesses wrote long after the events. (c) Model verdict: I find Lefkowitz the stronger on *ideas*, because a debt in styles and goods is what the evidence at Naukratis actually shows, and the claims

of a deeper debt rest on late writers — but Bernal is right that the contact was deep and long, and the Greeks’ own claims of debt are evidence that something travelled. I am weighing reasons with a stated frame (“ideas, not styles”), not ending the debate: a scholar with a different frame could weigh the same facts the other way.

Solution to Q11 (model plan and verdict). Claim picked: “papyrus changed how people kept records.” Sources: primary — the Wadi al-Jarf logbooks themselves (c. 2560–2550 BCE), the oldest written papyri known, and the Rosetta decree (27 March 196 BCE), carved in part in Egyptian scripts — the same writing tradition as Merer’s sheets; secondary — Herodotus’s account of Egypt, and modern accounts of papyrus use across the Mediterranean. Facts split from readings: facts — papyrus sheets were made by the six-step method, used in Egypt from its early days, and carried writing across the Mediterranean world; reading — “changed how people kept records” is a claim about importance, so it needs a frame. Both sides at their strongest: FOR — without papyrus, cheap, light, roll-able writing, record-keeping at that scale (diaries like Merer’s, royal decrees, Greek and Roman books) is hard to imagine; the word “paper” still carries it. AGAINST — clay, wax and parchment also kept records for centuries, and papyrus rotted in wet climates, so its reach had limits. Verdict (frame: “significant to people who kept records, at the time and since”): within that frame the claim holds — papyrus made writing light in weight, cheap and portable for about 3,000 years, and our word “paper” is a living legacy — but outside that frame (say, framed as “legacies of building”), the monuments outweigh it. What kept my mind steady: the primary sources show papyrus doing real work at the time, not just later praise.

Sources for this section

All web sources retrieved 24 August 2026.

- Wikipedia, “Papyrus” — the six-step making method; use across the Mediterranean world; the English word “paper” from “papyrus”.
- Wikipedia, “Wadi al-Jarf papyri” — oldest written papyri known, c. 2560–2550 BCE; found in 2013 at Wadi al-Jarf by a French-Egyptian team led by Pierre Tallet and Gregory Marouard; Merer’s logbook: years 26–27 of Khufu, Tura to Akhet-Khufu, about 30 blocks of 2–3 tonnes per trip, about a ten-day round trip, food from Heliopolis.
- Wikipedia, “Abydos, Egypt”, and the February 2021 dig announcement — one of the oldest known big breweries, c. 3100 BCE, reign of Narmer; joint Egyptian-American team led by Matthew Adams; rows of clay vats; about 22,400 litres per batch; bread and beer as wages.
- Wikipedia, “Great Pyramid of Giza” — Khufu, 4th dynasty, c. 2600 BCE, about 26 years of work; 146.6 m when new, 138.5 m today; base about 230 m a side; about 2.3 million blocks, roughly 6 million tonnes; Tura casing stone, Aswan granite to 80 t; UNESCO listing 1979 (criteria i, iii, vi); Herodotus’s 100,000 and Diodorus’s 360,000; the 1999 construction-management study, run with Mark Lehner and other Egyptologists: average about 13,200, peak about 40,000.
- Wikipedia, “Herodotus” — c. 484–c. 425 BCE; visited Egypt in the mid-400s BCE; Histories 2.50 (the gods’ names came from Egypt); 100,000 workers in three-month shifts over 20 years.
- Wikipedia, “Diodorus Siculus” — 360,000 workers.
- Wikipedia, “Great Pyramid of Giza” and “Al-Ma’mun” — the tunnel cut c. 820 CE, still the visitors’ entrance.
- Wikipedia, “Description de l’Égypte” — Napoleon’s scholars, 1798–1801; the great illustrated work published from 1809.
- Wikipedia, “Flinders Petrie” — the precise survey of the pyramids, 1880–1882.
- Wikipedia, “Mark Lehner” — the workers’ town at Giza, dug from 1988 (bakeries, sleeping places, animal bones); Wikipedia, “Zahi Hawass” — the workers’ cemetery, found 1990.
- ScanPyramids project: Nature (2 November 2017) — the Big Void, at least 30 m long, above the Grand Gallery, found by muon tomography (particle scanning); Nature Communications (2 March 2023) — the North Face Corridor, about 9 m long.
- Wikipedia, “Naukratis” — Greek trading town from c. 625 BCE; granted to the Greeks by Amasis II (ruled 570–526 BCE) after 570 BCE; goods traded.
- Wikipedia, “Rosetta Stone” — decree of Ptolemy V, 27 March 196 BCE; hieroglyphic, demotic and Greek; found at Rosetta in July 1799 by Pierre-François Bouchard; brought to Portsmouth in February 1802; Champollion’s reading announced 27 September 1822; now in the British Museum.

- Wikipedia, “Alexandria” — founded 331 BCE, after Alexander took Egypt in 332 BCE.
- Wikipedia, “Temple of Isis (Pompeii)” — cult from c. 100 BCE; rebuilt after the earthquake of 62 CE; buried by Vesuvius in 79 CE; rediscovered 1764.
- Wikipedia, “Pyramid of Cestius” — tomb of Gaius Cestius, c. 18–12 BCE, completed in 330 days.
- Martin Bernal, *Black Athena* (1987); Mary Lefkowitz, *Not Out of Africa* (1996) — the borrowing debate, each side at its strongest (books, not web sources).