

Chapter 7: Ancient Egypt - Land of the Pharaohs

The Gift of the Nile

Long ago, in the desert lands of northeastern Africa, an amazing civilization grew up along the banks of a great river called the Nile. The ancient Egyptians called their land "Kemet," which means "black land," because of the rich, dark soil left behind when the Nile River flooded each year.

Without the Nile River, Egypt would have been nothing but desert. Every summer, the river would overflow its banks and cover the land with water and fertile mud. When the water went down, farmers could plant their crops in the rich soil. This yearly flood was so important that the Egyptians built their whole calendar around it!

The Mighty Pharaohs

The rulers of ancient Egypt were called pharaohs. The Egyptians believed their pharaohs were gods on Earth, sent to rule over them. This made the pharaoh the most powerful person in all of Egypt. The pharaoh owned all the land, made all the laws, and commanded the army.

One of the most famous pharaohs was a woman named Hatshepsut, who ruled for 22 years and built many beautiful temples. Another famous pharaoh was the boy king Tutankhamun, who became pharaoh when he was only nine years old! But perhaps the most well-known pharaoh was Ramses II, who ruled for 66 years and built more monuments than any other pharaoh.

Pyramids: Houses for the Dead

The ancient Egyptians believed in life after death, so they spent a lot of time and money preparing for it. The pharaohs built enormous stone pyramids as their tombs. These pyramids were filled with treasure, furniture, food, and everything the pharaoh might need in the afterlife. The most famous pyramids are at Giza, near the modern city of Cairo. The largest pyramid, called the Great Pyramid, was built for Pharaoh Khufu about 4,500 years ago. It took thousands of workers about 20 years to build! The Great Pyramid is made of over 2 million stone blocks, each weighing as much as a car.

Next to the pyramids stands the Great Sphinx, a huge statue with the body of a lion and the head of a human. It guards the pyramids and has been watching over the desert for thousands of years.

Mummies and the Afterlife

The Egyptians believed that people needed their bodies in the afterlife, so they developed a special way to preserve dead bodies called mummification. First, they removed the organs and dried out the body using special salt. Then they wrapped the body in long strips of linen cloth, along with magical charms called amulets.

The whole process took 70 days! Rich people and pharaohs got the best mummification, while poor people got simpler treatments. The mummies were placed in beautiful painted coffins called sarcophagi and buried with their treasures.

Hieroglyphs: Picture Writing

The ancient Egyptians invented one of the world's first writing systems using pictures called hieroglyphs. Each hieroglyph could represent a sound, a word, or an idea. For example, a picture of a bird might mean the word "bird," or it might represent the sound that word makes. Egyptian scribes wrote on papyrus, a kind of paper made from reeds that grew along the Nile River. They wrote about everything from laws and taxes to stories and poems. For over 1,000 years, no one could read

hieroglyphs until a French scholar named Jean-François Champollion figured out how to decode them using a stone called the Rosetta Stone.

Daily Life in Ancient Egypt

Most ancient Egyptians were farmers who lived in small villages along the Nile. They grew wheat, barley, and vegetables, and raised cattle, sheep, and goats. During flood season, when they couldn't farm, many farmers worked on building projects like pyramids and temples.

Egyptian children played with toys like dolls, balls, and board games. They kept cats as pets because cats helped protect their grain from mice and rats. Rich families lived in large houses with gardens and pools, while poor families lived in small mud-brick houses.

Both men and women wore makeup, especially around their eyes. They believed this protected them from the sun and evil spirits. Wealthy Egyptians wore jewelry made of gold and precious stones, while ordinary people wore jewelry made of clay and copper.

Gods and Goddesses

The ancient Egyptians worshipped hundreds of gods and goddesses. Many of their gods had animal heads and human bodies. Ra was the sun god, with the head of a falcon. Anubis, the god of mummification, had the head of a jackal. Bastet was a cat goddess who protected homes and families.

The Egyptians built magnificent temples where priests performed daily rituals to keep the gods happy. The most important temple was at Karnak, which took over 1,000 years to complete!

The End of Ancient Egypt

Ancient Egyptian civilization lasted for over 3,000 years, longer than any other ancient civilization. Eventually, Egypt was conquered by other empires - first the Persians, then the Greeks under Alexander the Great, and finally the Romans. The last pharaoh was Queen Cleopatra VII, who ruled until 30 BCE.

Even though ancient Egypt ended long ago, we can still see its influence today. Many of our ideas about medicine, mathematics, and architecture came from the Egyptians. Museums around the world display Egyptian artifacts, and people still visit Egypt to see the amazing pyramids and temples.

What We Learned

Ancient Egypt teaches us that civilizations can grow and thrive when people work together and use their natural resources wisely. The Egyptians used the Nile River to create one of the world's greatest civilizations. They were amazing builders, artists, and inventors who left behind wonders that still amaze us today.

Chapter 7 Review Questions

Why was the Nile River so important to ancient Egypt?

What were pharaohs, and why were they considered special?

Why did the Egyptians build pyramids?

What is mummification, and why did Egyptians do it?

What are hieroglyphs, and what were they used for?

Think About It

If you were an ancient Egyptian, would you rather be a pharaoh, a scribe, or a farmer? Explain your choice and what your daily life might be like.