

Pyramids on the Nile

Chapter 2 Section Two

Birth of Egypt

- While Sumerian civilization was developing in Mesopotamia a similar process was happening along the banks of the Nile River.
- Early on Egypt was united into a single united kingdom
- The Egyptian civilization would last for 3000 years

The gift of the Nile

- The Nile River flows from the highlands of east-central Africa 4,100 miles to the Mediterranean Sea.
- Egypt's settlements arose along the Nile on a narrow strip of land made fertile by the river.
- The change from fertile soil to desert was so abrupt that a person could stand with a foot in each.
- Every year in July the melting snow from the mountains in east-central Africa caused the Nile River to spill over its banks.

- The river receded in October leaving behind a thick layer of fertile black mud.
- The peasants would plow the land and prepare it for planting before the sun dried out the soil
- Throughout the fall and winter they grew wheat and barley irrigating it from the river
- The river was so important to Egyptian Society that they worshipped it as a God.

Upper and Lower Egypt

- For most of their history Egyptians only knew the lower part of the river.
- The Last 750 miles before the river emptied into the Mediterranean Sea.
- Egyptian territory ended at the jagged granite cliffs and boulders of the first cataract
- Riverboats could not pass the cataracts.
- Between the First Cataract and the Mediterranean lay two regions of Egypt, Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt

Lower Egypt

- Lower Egypt consisted of the Nile Delta Region which stretched about 100 miles inland from the Mediterranean
- The delta is a broad, flat, triangular area of land formed by deposits of silt at the mouth of the river
- The delta was also home to many birds and wild animals.
- The Nile provided a reliable system of transportation between Upper and Lower Egypt
- The river flows north so northbound boats drifted with the current
- Boats traveling south could hoist a sail and the prevailing winds would carry them against the current.
- The ease of travel on the river helped to unite Egypt's villages and promote trade.

Farming in Egypt

- The flooding of the Nile river was very regular and predictable.
- If the floodwaters were a few feet lower than normal the lower amount of fresh water and silt could lead to thousands of people starving.
- If the floodwaters were higher than normal they could wash away the mud-brick villages destroying grainaries and seed supplies.

Egypt is isolated

- The vast deserts on either side of the Nile provided a natural barrier between Egypt and other lands.
- Egyptians were forced to stay close to the river and their interaction with other nations was limited.
- In its early history Egypt was spared the constant warfare that was happening in Mesopotamia
- By 3200 B.C. Egyptians were coming into contact with the people of Mesopotamia.
- Caravans loaded with goods traveled between the two regions.

Trade leads to Egyptian Culture

- By 2000 B.C. Egyptian traders were traveling up the Nile on Barges to Nubia and Kush.
- The Egyptians were traveling south in search of gold, ivory, cattle, and granite blocks for their temples.
- Early Egyptians may have borrowed some ideas regarding the development of cities and writing from Mesopotamia.
- After Mesopotamia's influence ended Egypt blended the cultures of the Nile valley people with the cultures of peoples who migrated into the valley from other parts of Africa and the Fertile Crescent.

Menes Unites Egypt

- Egyptians lived in farming villages as far back as 5000 B.C.
- Each village had its own rituals, gods, and chieftain.
- By 3200 B.C. the villages of Egypt were under the rule of two separate kingdoms, Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt
- 3100 B.C. Menes-Strong king of Upper Egypt united all of Egypt
- Menes relocated his capital at Memphis, near the spot where Upper and Lower Egypt meet.
- Menes established the first Egyptian Dynasty
- There would be 31 Egyptian Dynasties that would span 2,600 years.

The Egyptian Theocracy

- Because of a lack of written records not much is known about the first two dynasties.
- The third dynasty begins the Old Kingdom which lasted from 2660-2180 B.C.
- In Egypt the kings were Gods-almost as splendid and powerful as the gods of the heavens.
- Egyptian god-kings were called pharaohs
- The Pharaoh was the center of Egypt's religion, government, and army.
- Egypt's government was a theocracy-one in which the ruler is a divine figure.
- The Pharaoh had full responsibility for the well-being of the kingdom and was responsible for causing the sun to rise, the Nile to flood, and the crops to grow.

Ruling after death

- Egyptians believed that their pharaohs ruled even after they died.
- The Pharaoh had an eternal spirit called the Ka which participated in the governing of Egypt.
- Kings expected to reign forever so their tombs were more important than their palaces.
- In the Old Kingdom the resting place for the Pharaohs was a pyramid.

The Pyramids

- The pyramids were incredible engineering achievements
- Egyptians had not yet begun to use the wheel
- There was a good supply of limestone and granite for construction of pyramids
- The Great Pyramid of Giza-
 - Limestone quarried 400 miles up river
 - Each perfectly cut block weighed aprox. 2.5 tons...some up to 15 tons.
 - 2 million blocks were stacked 481 feet high
 - The pyramid covered 13 acres

Egyptian Religion

- Early Egyptians were polytheistic
- Most important gods were Ra-sun god
 - Horus-god of light
 - Isis- ideal mother and wife
- Egyptians worshipped more than 2000 gods and goddesses

The Egyptian Afterlife

- The Egyptians believed in an afterlife
- They believed they would be judged for their deeds when they died
 - Osiris would weigh their heart against a feather and if their heart had been made heavy by sin the "Devourer of Souls" would pounce on the impure heart and eat it.
 - If the soul passed the test for purity and strength then they would live forever in the beautiful "Other World"
- People of all classes prepared for the afterlife.
 - Kings and Queens built elaborate tombs and filled the tomb with items that the dead person might need in the afterlife. (clothing, food, cosmetics, jewelry)

mummification

- Egyptians preserved a dead persons body through the process of mummification- embalming and drying the corpse to prevent it from decaying.
- They would draw the brains out through the nostrils with an iron hook, make an incision in the side of the body and remove the bowels, fill the belly with myrrh, cassia and other perfumes, soak the body for 70 days in natron, wrap it up and put the mummy in a coffin and place it in the tomb.

The Book of the Dead

- Egyptians consulted scrolls called the Book of the Dead that contained hymns, prayers, and magic spells intended to guide the soul in the afterlife

Egyptian Society

- Egyptian society formed a pyramid with
 - King queen and royal family at the top
 - Below them were the upper class-wealthy landowners, govt. officials, priests, army commanders.
 - The middle class included merchants, and artisans
 - At the base of the pyramid was the lower class-peasant farmers, unskilled laborers.
- In the later stages of Egyptian history slaves were a widespread source of labor
- Egyptians were not locked into their social class.
- Lower and middle class people could gain higher status through marriage or success at their jobs
- To gain the highest social level people had to be able to read and write.

Women in Egypt

- Women in Egypt had many of the same rights as men.
- They could own and trade property
- They could propose marriage and seek divorce. If granted the divorce a woman would be entitled to 1/3 of the couples property.

Egyptian writing

- Hieroglyphics- Egyptian system of writing
- In the earliest form of hieroglyphics a picture stood for an idea
- In time the system changed so that pictures stood for sounds as well as ideas
- Hieroglyphics could almost be used like letters of the alphabet.
- The Egyptians invented a better writing surface than clay tablets
- They used papyrus-a reed that grows along the banks of the Nile for paper
- They split the papyrus into strips, dampened them laid them out to dry... the sap from the papyrus glued the strips together into a paperlike sheet

Egyptian technology

- In order to assess and collect taxes the Egyptians developed a system of written numbers
- Farmers used an early form of geometry
- The Egyptian calendar was so accurate it fell short of the true solar year by only six hours
- Egyptian doctors could check a patient's heart rate, splint broken bones, use effective treatments for wounds and fevers and do surgery.

The Middle Kingdom

- The Old Kingdom ended in about 2180 B.C.
- Historians call the period of weakness and turmoil that followed the First Intermediate period.
- Strong Pharaohs regained control during the Middle Kingdom 2080-1640 B.C.
- During the Middle Kingdom pharaohs improved trade and transportation, built a canal to connect the Nile River to the Red Sea, built huge dikes to trap and channel the floodwaters of the Nile for irrigation and created thousands of new acres of farmland by draining the swamps of Lower Egypt

The Hyksos invade

- The Middle Kingdom ended in 1640 B.C. when a group of Asian nomads called the Hyksos swept across the isthmus of Suez into Egypt on horse-drawn chariots.
- The Hyksos ruled much of Egypt from 1640-1570 B.C.
- The period when the Hyksos ruled is called the Second Intermediate Period