

THE NILE

The Water

Where the river Nile starts is not certain. Some people think that it originates in Burundi. The water in the Nile comes from the White Nile and the Blue Nile. The White Nile water comes from Lake Victoria whilst the Blue Nile water comes from lake Tana in Ethiopia.



Quick Facts!

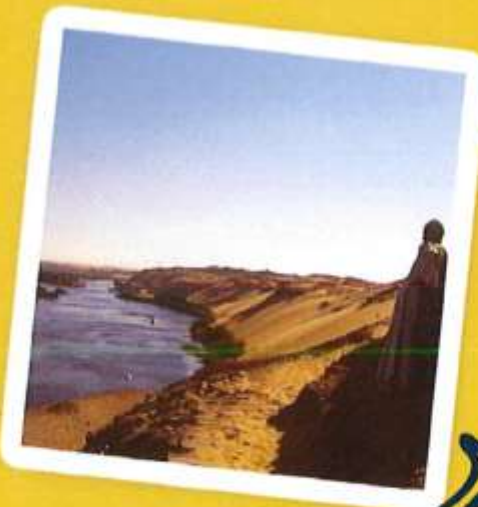
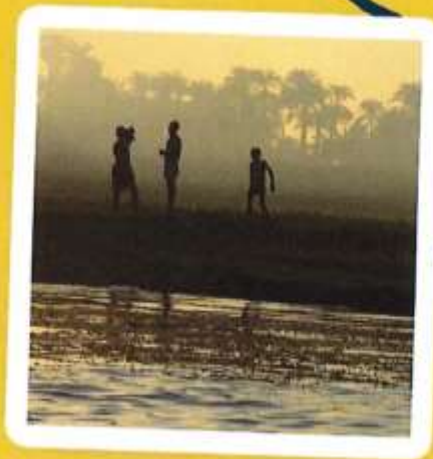
1. The Nile is approximately 4132 miles long (6650km). That makes it the longest river in the world.
2. The river starts in the country of Burundi and runs through Ethiopia, Uganda, Sudan and touches a few more before it reaches Egypt, where it flows into the Mediterranean Sea.
3. Since ancient Egyptian times, crocodiles have lived in the water, most measuring in at 4 metres long.

The Uses

Nile was the reason that the first farmers settled there around 5000BC. The river was used for water, food and transport, as well as making the soil in the area perfect for growing crops.

The river banks were also filled with a reed called papyrus, which was turned into a kind of paper. The ancient Egyptians also used these reeds to build the boats that they would use to transport people, goods and materials up and down the river.

The ancient Egyptians would also use the river to catch fish with spears and nets as well as catch birds that came to the water.



Flooding

The melting snow on the Ethiopian mountains and the summer rain is what caused the flood. The water would rush down the Nile and into Egypt where it would burst the banks and flows onto all the nearby flat fields.

The farmers would then build mud-brick reservoirs to keep the water in. They would then build canals to allow the water to flow near their land to make it easy to move to the crops.



Moving the Water

The farmers would lift the water from the canals using a tool called a shaduf (or shadoof) (above). A shaduf is a large pole balanced on a beam. At one end of the pole was a heavy weight and on the other end was a bucket. The ancient Egyptian farmer would pull the bucket down into the water, then the weight would pull the filled bucket back out again. He would then swing the bucket round and empty the bucket onto his crops.



The God

It was very important to pay thanks to a God for their gifts so people would pay tribute to the God Hapi for bringing the flood to the land to allow them to grow their crops. A lot of farmers would keep an amulet of Hapi or a statue as a sign of respect.

Pyramids

The pyramids were the tombs that were built for the Pharaohs – the kings. The size of the pyramid was built to show the importance of the person who is buried in it. The ancient Egyptians believed that if a person was mummified that they would live forever, so they built these tombs to keep their bodies.

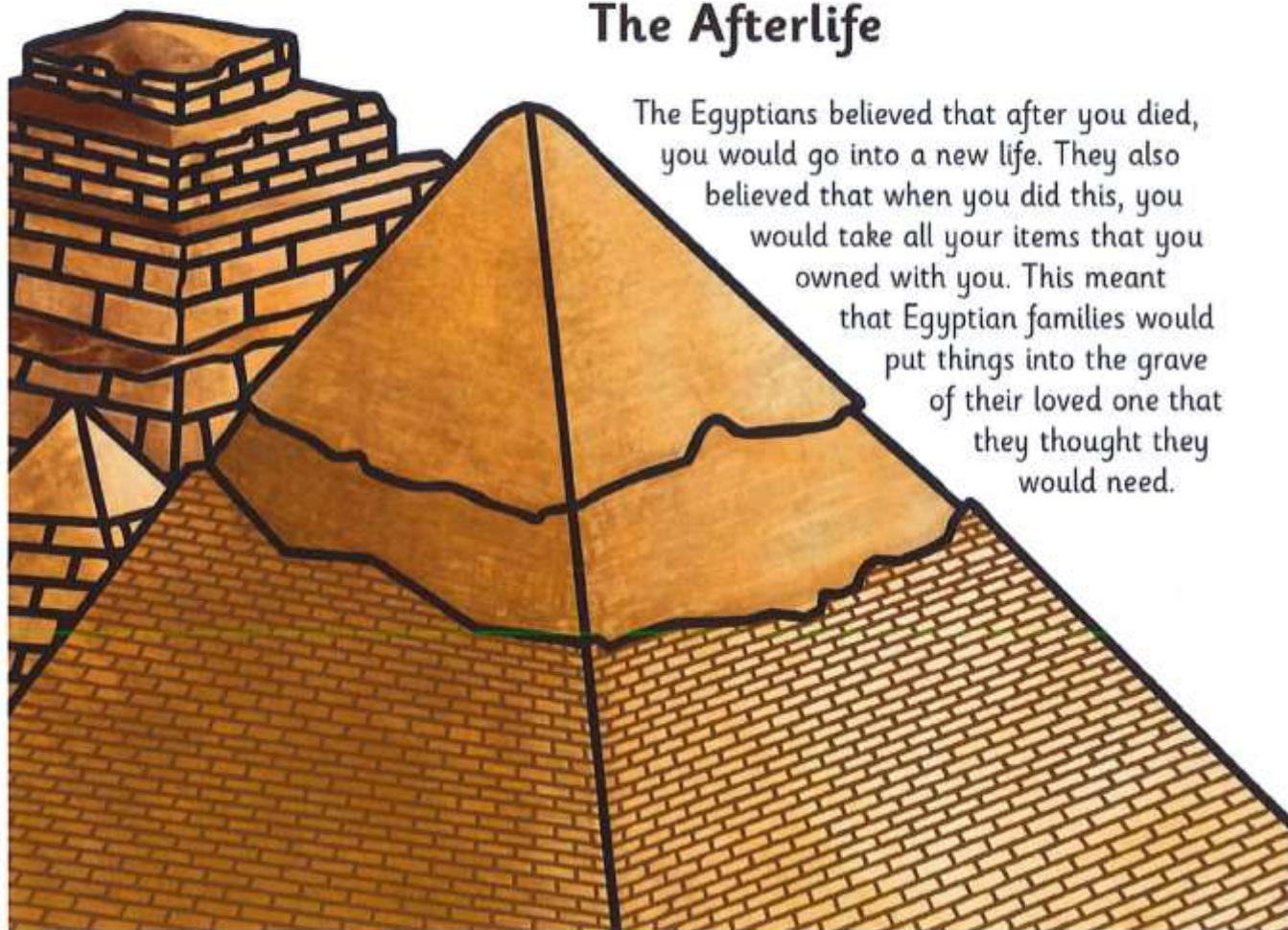
The most famous pyramid is the Great Pyramid (right), built for Pharaoh Khufu. When it was built, it was over 140 metres high and took 20 years to build. It stands alongside many other smaller ones. The Great Pyramid has a rough rocky surface because the outer layer of rock has worn down. When the pyramid was originally built, it would have had an outer layer of stone with a smooth appearance.

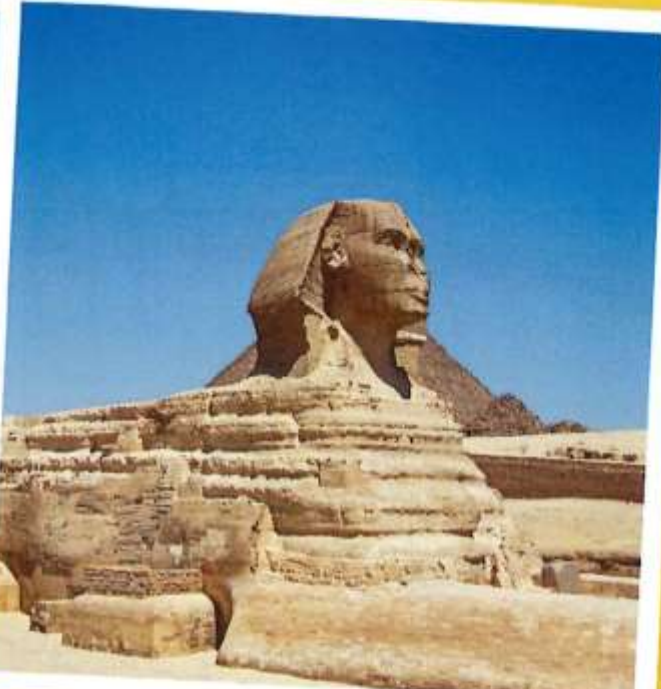
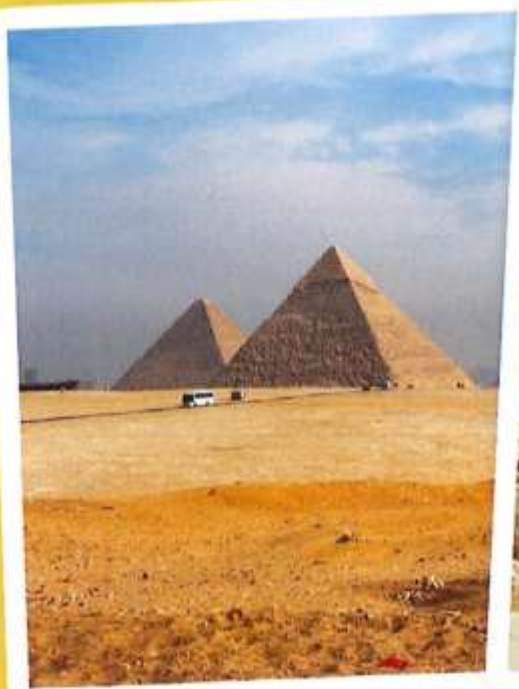
Inside the pyramids, there are a lot of hieroglyphics which tell the story of the pharaoh that was buried there. These would be used to tell the achievements and adventures of the Pharaoh. These hieroglyphics are why we know so much about the ancient Egyptian civilisation and the people who ruled it.

There are over 130 pyramids that have been found in Egypt, the earliest being the Pyramid of Djoser which was built around 2650BC. The last pyramids were finished around 1800 BC.

The Afterlife

The Egyptians believed that after you died, you would go into a new life. They also believed that when you did this, you would take all your items that you owned with you. This meant that Egyptian families would put things into the grave of their loved one that they thought they would need.





The Tomb

The inside of an Egyptian tomb looked something like the example below. The body of the pharaoh was placed in a sarcophagus (a large stone coffin) which was then surrounded by other chambers, filled with items that they thought they would need in the afterlife, mostly decorative items covered in gold.

The Sphinx

The sphinx (above) had the body of a lion and the head of a pharaoh and sometimes the wings of a large bird. It was a mythical creature which was meant to guard the pyramid from harm. In myth, the sphinx is said to have asked people riddles and eaten anyone who answered incorrectly.



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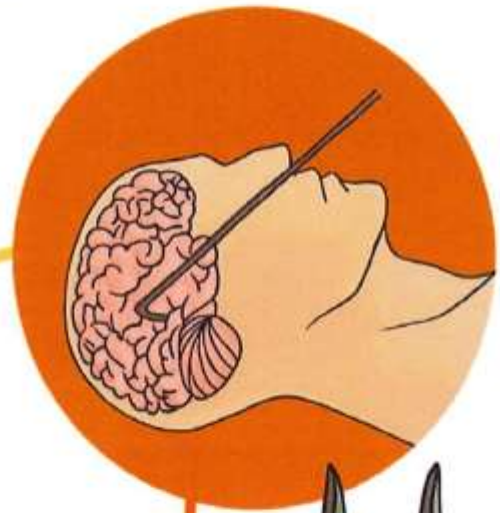
Mummification Process

From Body to Burial

1. The body was put on a table and it would be washed and purified.



2. They would then take out the organs, leaving only the heart. The brain would be taken out through the nose using a hook.



3. At this point, the body was filled with stuffing ready for the next stage.

Some of the organs removed from the body were placed in special jars called canopic jars. The jars were carved into the shape of the four sons of Horus – one of the ancient Egyptian Gods. Each one protected a different organ.

a. Duamatef has the head of a jackal and it protects the stomach.

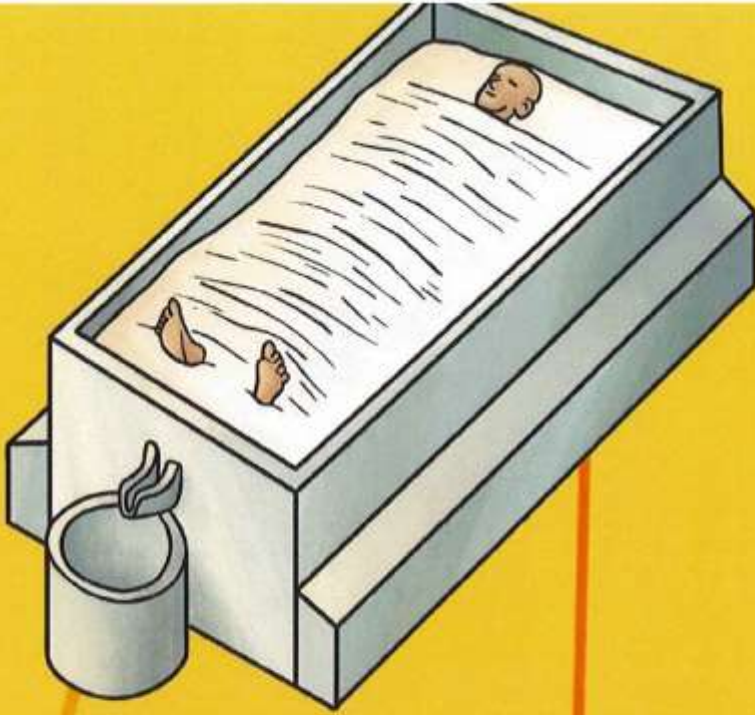
b. Imsety has a human head and he guards the liver.

c. Qebehsenuf had a falcon's head and protected the intestines.

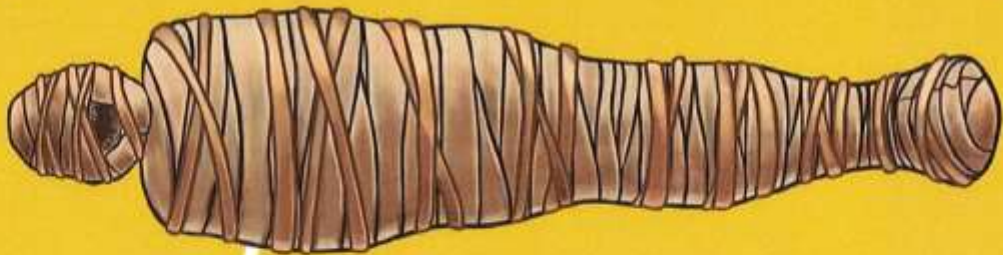
d. Hapi, with the baboon head protects the lungs.

The four jars would be put in a chest and left in the tomb with the mummy.

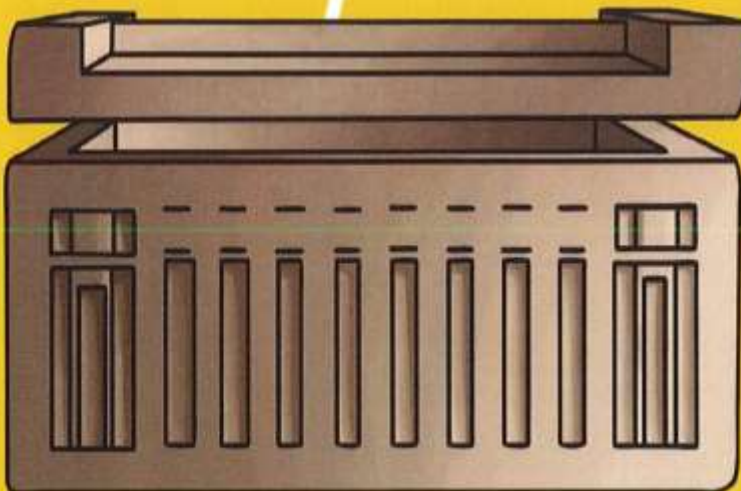




4. The body was placed in a bath of a substance called natron. The natron would be used to dry up the rest of the moisture in the body.

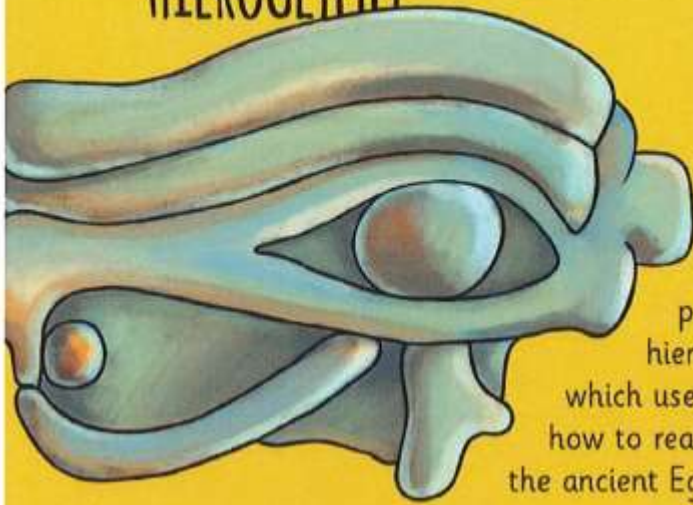


5. After about 40 days, the stuffing in the body was removed and sawdust of linen was put in. The mummy was then wrapped in long rolls of linen and then covered in a sheet called a shroud.



6. Finally, the body was placed in a large stone coffin called a sarcophagus which was inside the tomb.

HIEROGLYPHS



What Are They?

The word hieroglyphics comes from the Greek translation 'holy writing'. You can see examples of this writing on ancient Egyptian artifacts like wall carvings, pottery and the papyrus paper. The hieroglyphs are the ancient writing system which uses symbols and pictures. We have found how to read the hieroglyphics to understand how the ancient Egyptians lived.

Why Did They Write Them?

The ancient Egyptians thought it was important to write down all the information they could about their Kings and their religion. So they made the hieroglyphs to tell people in the future what happened. Hieroglyphs were one of the ways the Egyptians would write. They mainly used them in religious texts, on statues and in tombs.



Who Wrote Them?

Not everyone could read and write the hieroglyphs, only a group of people called scribes would learn how to do it. The scribes would almost all be men but there is proof of female doctors who could also read them for understanding medical texts.

To become a scribe you would need to go to a special school. At school you would learn to read and write hieroglyphic and other scripts. The children would spend hours writing on sheets of papyrus and practice on pieces of rock and pottery.

Where Would They Write Them?

In school – The scribes would be taught how to write and carve in hieroglyphics. Many students would spend hours copying hundreds of signs and it was hard work – there is even evidence that some of the scribes skipped class so they didn't have to do it.

In the fields – After the scribes finished in school, one of the first jobs many of them had was working in fields, counting crops and animals. They would let the government know how many of these would be taken as tax.

In tombs – The Egyptians believed that the hieroglyphics in the tomb helped the body get to the afterlife. The scribes would write spells on the walls then the craftsmen would come and carve away what the scribes had written. It was very important that the craftsmen did it perfectly or the spell would not work.

In temples – The temples were the houses of the gods and goddesses. The priests would be the scribes, they would carve the walls with hieroglyphics and drawings to show their respect. Instructions for rituals to please the gods would also be written on the walls and on paper for other people to use.

How Can We Read Them?

The secret to reading the ancient Egyptian text was found in 1799 when the Rosetta stone was uncovered. It is called this because it was found in a town in Egypt with the same name.

The text on the stone is thought to have been written by priests, it lists all the good things that the pharaoh has done for the priests and the people of Egypt.

The reason why this stone is so important to reading the language is that it is written in three languages which makes it very easy to translate. It is written in hieroglyphs, Demotic (a more common Egyptian way of writing) and an old Greek text. It took scholars twenty years to translate all the text into a modern language.

