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Pharaohs

Egypt

Egypt is in the north-east corner of Africa and is well-known for its ancient history and culture. Much of Egypt is covered in desert and there is very little rain. The Nile is the main river that flows through Egypt.



A map of Egypt

Life in ancient Egypt

The Nile played an important part in the daily life of the ancient Egyptians. It provided water, food, transportation and excellent soil for growing food. The people of ancient Egypt built cities, temples, palaces and pyramids on both sides of the river and created a great civilisation. The Egyptian people were ruled by a pharaoh. Pharaohs were the richest and most powerful kings or queens and were believed to be messengers of the gods. The rest of the people were organised into a very strict hierarchical system of viziers; nobles; scribes; priests; farmers, craftspeople and soldiers; peasants and slaves.

Famous pharaohs

Khafra, c2558–2532 BC

Khafra was responsible for the building of Giza's second pyramid and his face is believed to be the model for the Great Sphinx that guards the pyramids.



Thutmose III, c1479–1425 BC

Thutmose is thought to be one of the greatest rulers of ancient Egypt. He was very young when he became king, so Hatshepsut ruled in his place until her death in 1458 BC.



Hatshepsut, c1473–1458 BC

Hatshepsut was one of Egypt's most successful female pharaohs and was responsible for the building of a temple at Deir el-Bahri.



Tutankhamun, c1336–1327 BC

Tutankhamun became pharaoh when he was only eight or nine years old and Egypt's old religion was restored during his rule.



Ramesses II, c1279–1213 BC

Ramesses had many monuments built, such as the temples at Abu Simbel and Nubia. He was also known as Ramesses the Great.



Cleopatra VII, c51–30 BC

Cleopatra was the last pharaoh of Egypt and ruled with the help of two Roman leaders, Julius Caesar and Mark Antony.



Egyptian gods

Ancient Egyptians believed that many different gods and goddesses controlled the world. They were thought to look like humans and animals and each god represented a different aspect of life in ancient Egypt. The Egyptians performed rituals and built temples to honour the gods.

Ra was the most important Egyptian god. He was the god of the Sun and was thought to be reborn every morning.

Anubis was the god of embalming and the dead. He had the head of a jackal and the body of a man.

Ma'at was the goddess of truth, justice and harmony. She symbolised the balance of life on Earth.

Tefnut was the goddess of moisture and the mother of the sky and the Earth. She had the head of a lioness.



Ra **Anubis** **Ma'at** **Tefnut**

Hieroglyphics

Ancient Egyptian writing is called hieroglyphics. Hieroglyphics use pictures to represent different objects, sounds, actions and ideas. Each character is known as a hieroglyph. There are more than 700 hieroglyphs. In 1799, a stone carving called the Rosetta Stone was found in Egypt. The Rosetta Stone had the same writing on it in three different languages and helped a Frenchman, Jean-François Champollion, to read hieroglyphics.

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Discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb timeline

1922	
1st November	Carter and his team begin their final season working in the Valley of the Kings.
4th November	A boy carrying water for the workers discovers the steps to a tomb by accident.
5th November	Carter realises the steps lead to a royal tomb when he uncovers a special stamp.
6th November	Carter sends a telegram to Lord Carnarvon to tell him about the tomb and invites him to visit.
24th November	Lord Carnarvon and his daughter, Lady Evelyn Herbert, arrive to join Carter and his team.
25th November	The door to the tomb is removed and the team enter.
26th November	Carter enters a second doorway and discovers strange animals, statues and gold. Carter's team also discover objects that tell them about ancient Egyptian daily life in another room. They begin to remove items from the tomb. This takes seven weeks.
1923	
17th February	The team begin taking apart a third door. They discover the burial chamber of Tutankhamun.

Discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb

A wealthy Englishman, Lord Carnarvon, was interested in ancient Egypt. He paid for an archaeologist called Howard Carter and a team of workers to carry out excavations in the Valley of the Kings on the west bank of the Nile, where they discovered Tutankhamun's tomb. It took Carter and his team 10 years to remove over 3000 items from the tomb. After the discovery, a series of strange events occurred, including the death of Lord Carnarvon. Many people believed a curse had been placed on Carter's team for disturbing the tomb.



Howard Carter examining the tomb of Tutankhamun

Afterlife

One of the key beliefs in ancient Egypt was that when a person died, their spirit would live again in the afterlife. The ancient Egyptians had special rituals to prepare the body, and the dead were buried with possessions that would help them in the afterlife, such as food, drink, clothes and treasures. The pharaohs had huge tombs built to house their bodies and possessions. These tombs are the famous Pyramids of Giza that are guarded by a sphinx.

Glossary

archaeologist	A person who studies the lives of people who lived in the past.
afterlife	A world the ancient Egyptians believed they would travel to after death.
curse	A statement or warning supposed to inflict harm on someone or something.
Giza	A place in Egypt where large pyramids and the Great Sphinx were built.
hierarchy	A system where members of a society are ranked according to their status.
hieroglyphics	A method of writing used by the ancient Egyptians that used pictures to represent objects, sounds, actions and ideas.
pyramid	A huge, stone tomb built for the wealthy pharaohs of Egypt.
ritual	A fixed set of words or actions that are performed over time, usually as part of a ceremony.
Rosetta Stone	A stone with Greek and Egyptian writing on it, which helped historians to unlock and understand the code of hieroglyphics.
sphinx	A fictional creature with the body of a lion and the head of a pharaoh or god.
tomb	A stone structure or underground room where someone is buried.
Valley of the Kings	A valley in Egypt where many tombs were built.
vizier	An official who was of high importance and served the pharaoh.

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