EGYPT: SOCIETY IN NEW KINGDOM
EGYPT; DYNASTIES XIX AND XX

THE GEOGRAPHICAL ENVIRONMENT

GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING

- North-East Africa on the Northern coastline
- Borders:
  - North by Mediterranean Sea
  - South by Nubia
  - East by Red Sea
  - North-east by Palestine and Lebanon
  - West by Libya
- 97% desert, 3% fertile agricultural land
- It is on major land and sea routes making it a commanding position and ideal for trading and natural resources

NATURAL FEATURES

The Nile

Geography:
- Origin in the central African highlands (Ethiopia and Uganda)
- Flow north through Egypt to the delta at the edge of the Mediterranean Sea (7000km)
- Central to functioning of civilization
  - Constant factor in daily life – provided water and fertile silt for agriculture
  - Vital as rarely rained
- Deposited a layer of silt which made the field’s fertile
- Main transport route within Egypt

- **Regulated seasons**
  - **Inundation (Akhet)**
    - Flood from June → September
    - A poor flood caused hardship and famine
    - caused by melting snows and monsoons further south
    - carried by shadouf to irrigate to fields
    - Workers were not in fields but on Pharaohs building programs
  - **Emergence of the fields (Peret)**
    - October → February
    - Water receded and soil was moist – crops planted
  - **Drought (Shemu)**
    - March → June
    - Crops harvested, grains threshed and stored

- **IMPORTANCE**: agriculture = basis of economy + inundation provided fertile soil for next year’s crops

- **Herodotus (Greek historian from 1AD)**
  - “Egypt is the gift of the Nile”
    - Dependent on it for life, cultivation and civilization
    - Described the typography and geography of Ancient Egypt

- **Nilometer at Aswan and Memphis**
  - stone staircase on river banks with regular steps used to measure the height of the river
  - kept records of height throughout year

- **Hymn to Hapi – the god of the Nile**
  - “Praise to you Hapi... come to nourish Egypt!”
    - Importance for agriculture and survival
  - “When your flow is sluggish... a million men perish”
    - Famine during low tides leading to desperation in the country and internal conflict

- **Relief of God Hapi**
  Hand in upward gesture = worship of Hapi
  Water plants on head = image of fertility in vegetation which the Nile brings
  Ankh = symbol of life supplied by Nile

- **TGH James**: “The Nile both made possible and maintained life in Egypt”

- **Upper Egypt**
  - From Aswan (south, near Nubian boarder) → Abydos (central)
  - Main locations: Thebes, Abydos, Aswan
  - Pharaohs white crown of Upper Egypt
  - Archaeological remains of Aswan and Thebes

- **Lower Egypt**
- Fertile marshy **delta** of the Nile river where it branches into smaller channels
  - Flat alluvial plain with lush soil and wildlife — fertile for growing crops
  - Herodotus “water and marshlands”
- From Memphis ➔ Mediterranean Sea
- Main locations: Memphis, Giza, Sakkara, Heliopolis, Per-Ramesses
- Pharaohs red crown of Lower Egypt
- Archaeological remains are very fragmentary — some of Memphis remains
  
  **The Black Lands (Kmt)**
  = fertile strip either side of the Nile where crops where grown
- Enclosed by desert cliffs and the delta
- Herodotus: “Egyptian soil is black and friable... mud and silt carried by river”

  **The Red Lands (Deshret)**
  = unproductive desert and rocky cliff surrounding both sides of the Nile Valley
  e.g. south in Nubia and west in Libya
- Provided Egypt with some protection on the Western and Southern side — less easily invaded across desert = natural defence
- Herodotus: awareness of different types of land “Libyan soil... redder and more sandy”

The contrast of these two lands created the belief of duality in Egyptian life—between life and death, chaos and order

| RESOURCES OF NK EGYPT AND NEIGHBOURS |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|
| **NEIGHBOUR**                  | **RELATIONS**   |
| NUBIA: South                   | Egypt controlled Nubia because of its natural resources (gold) and it provided a trade route from Africa |
  - Wawat = peaceful            |                  |
  - Kush = hostile               |                  |
| PALESTINE: North-East          | Egypt wanted to control trade through the region |
  - Populated by tribal groups   | Battles to maintain control |
| SYRIA: further North-East      | Wanted to control for trade routes to the East—mostly hostile relations |
  - Dominated by Hittites        | Peace treaty with R:II |
| LIBYA: west                    | Wanted Egypt’s resources — hostile relations |
  - Tribal, primitive            |                  |
In R-period Egypt become more cosmopolitan = interchange of ideas and substance + outsiders no longer hostile and feared.

Egypt was supplied with a good quantity of natural resources – some items were imported with could not be produced themselves

In the Ramesside period they had a taste for the exotic and luxury items e.g. ivory, ebony, leopard, giraffe and ostrich eggs and feathers

D: IX – E very wealthy and prosperous = could afford to import – trade and exchange

### Natural Resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Where Found:</th>
<th>Definition:</th>
<th>Major Uses:</th>
<th>Specific example/evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Papyrus</td>
<td>Grows naturally on the river bank of the Nile from the Delta down to Thebes</td>
<td>Thin, reedy plant. Fibers useful and durable</td>
<td>Flowers used as decoration Stems used for Papyrus paper, baskets, ropes, sleeping mats, sandals, small boats (canoes)</td>
<td>The Great Harris Papyrus from time of Ramesses III in Dynasty XX → in BM – shows Ramesses III making a list of his offering to the gods in the temple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fish</td>
<td>In the Nile river in abundance</td>
<td>Food Source</td>
<td>Fishing practice was an industry for food and leisure activity. Dried Fish = ordinary people’s major food source.</td>
<td>Tomb painting at Deir el Medina of men catching fish on the Nile with nets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leeks, onions, lettuce, beans</td>
<td>Fertile Black land – on the river banks of the Nile – Upper and Lower Egypt</td>
<td>Food source</td>
<td>Diet – healthy largely vegetarian diet. Agriculture worker would grow in own gardens and commercially Temple offerings Lettuce – makes oil Flax plant = grown for linen and Lin seed oil</td>
<td>Wall paintings of vegetable crops being grown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figs, dates, grapes</td>
<td>Black land – suitable climate so grew well Best grapes from delta - Thebes</td>
<td>Commercial crops used for bartering – no money Grown for individual use Wine = major drink from grape Figs/dates = used as sweeteners Temple offerings</td>
<td></td>
<td>Wine labels Inscriptions in tombs of the nobles who were responsible for the Pharaoh’s Heb Sed – Pharaohs party celebration Pashdu’s tomb = wall painting of him under date palm drinking from the water of the Nile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>limestone</td>
<td>In to cliffs and hills either side of the Nile e.g. quarries near Aswan</td>
<td>Pale colored, smooth, white, could be polished</td>
<td>Used for outer surfaces of buildings</td>
<td>Seti I temple at Abydos from D: XIX</td>
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</table>
**Imported Resources**

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<th>Type</th>
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<th>Major uses</th>
<th>example</th>
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<tr>
<td>gold</td>
<td>Nubia – ruled by Egypt</td>
<td>Mostly jewellery in Ramesside period</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timber</td>
<td>Cedar = Lebanon, Ebony = Africa</td>
<td>Boats, temple doors, coffins, furniture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>copper</td>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>Decoration, wire on jewellery</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oil</td>
<td>Mediterranean - Crete = luxury item</td>
<td>Olive oil used for creams and lamps/ lighting, cosmetics</td>
<td>Evidence of trade in period between Egypt and Crete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ivory</td>
<td>Elephant and Hippopotamus tasks – traded up from central Africa</td>
<td>Personal items, small statues/ figurines, Inlaid work</td>
<td>Hair combs made of ivory, Tribute/ reliefs of elephant tasks being presented to the Pharaoh Ramesside II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lapis lazuli</td>
<td>Traded across from Afghanistan via the Near Eastern trade routes</td>
<td>Jewellery, small figures</td>
<td>Cairo Museum – signet ring with gold surrounding – name in cartosh – Ramesses II</td>
</tr>
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**Significant Sites**

- Ramesses II temple at Abydos: granite door frame
- Statue of Ramesses II: 17m high statue at the Ramesseum (Thebes)
- Temples of Amun (god) at Karnak, Luxor
- Ramesses III sent an expedition to the Sinai to collect turquoise
- Doesn’t survive. Wires of beaded necklaces in Cairo Museum from D: XIX
- Per Ramesses in Delta: bronze chariot parts → Cairo museum from D: XIX
- Herodotus – description of mummification process
- Granaries and storehouses e.g. Ramesseum and per-Ramesses