The wealth of Africa
Ancient Egypt

Students’ worksheets
ANCIENT EGYPT

1. 5500–3000 – Predynastic
2. 3000–2686 – Early Dynastic
3. 2686–2134 – Old Kingdom
4. 2080–1640 – Middle Kingdom
5. 1570–1070 – New Kingdom
6. Later Dynasties and Ptolemaic Period
7. 30BC–330AD – Roman Period

Millennium BC

1. 3000 – Union of Upper and Lower Egypt
2. 2570 – Pyramids built
3. 1650 – Hyksos invasions
4. 1490 – Hatshepsut rules
5. 1350 – Tutankhamun rules
6. 1279 – Ramesses II rules
7. 727 – Period of Kushite rule
8. 30 – Roman invasion

Millennium AD

Front cover image: Seated couple, British Museum
SHEET 1: HOW RIGID WAS EGYPTIAN SOCIETY?

Evidence seems to suggest that Egyptians knew their place, and that moving between different classes was rare and difficult. The influence of religion was possibly key in maintaining a social order.

Source 1

Egyptians are the only people where all the craftsmen are forbidden to follow any other occupation or belong to any other class of citizens than those laid down by the laws and handed down to them from their parents. Among the Egyptians, if any craftsman should take part in public affairs or do several crafts, he is severely punished.

Diodorus Siculus (1st century BC): 257

Source 2

Now of the Egyptians there are seven classes, and of these one class is called that of the priests, and another that of the warriors, while the others are the cowherds, shepherds, shopkeepers, interpreters and boatmen.

Herodotus (c. 440 BC): 135

Questions

1. Do the writers suggest that Egyptian society was rigid?
2. Why might society have been rigid?

Task

Place these pictures of people from different levels of Egyptian society in order of importance. Which ones are difficult to place?
** SHEET 2: HOW AND WHY WERE EGYPTIANS SUCCESSFUL TRADERS? **

There is some debate among historians as to whether Egyptian merchants traded to make themselves rich, or whether it was done on the orders, and for the benefit, of the pharaoh or his nobles.

**Source 1**
The strategic location of Egypt’s waterways helped trade between the three active continents of Europe, Africa and Asia. Man-made navigation channels allowed access between the Mediterranean Sea at Alexandria and the navigable River Nile channel.

Gadalla 2007: 246–247

**Source 3**
The Cheops boat (4,500 years old) ‘is superior and much more seaworthy than Columbus’ Santa Maria, the Mayflower, or the Viking ships’ [all of which sailed across the Atlantic].

Gadalla 2007: 242

**Source 4**
Turquoise could be obtained only from Sinai; silver from the North Mediterranean; copper and gold from Nubia, while such fine woods as cedar, juniper, and ebony, as well as products such as incense and myrrh had to be imported from western Asia and tropical Africa.

Shaw 2002: 313

**Source 5**
Not only have you a monopoly of the shipping of the entire Mediterranean because of the beauty of your harbours, the great size of your fleet, and the quantity and marketing of the products of every land. The result is that the trade of practically the whole world is yours. For Alexandria is situated, as it were, at the crossroads of the whole world.

Dio Chrysostom (c. AD 100): 207

**Questions**

1. From the map, which were the three most valuable resources that Egypt had to trade with?
2. Why did Egypt need to take over Nubia?
3. Why did Egyptians trade, according to these sources?
4. Why were they so successful?
SHEET 3: HOW DID THE ECONOMY WORK?

There is some doubt as to the extent to which ancient Egypt was what is now called a free market economy. Some suggest it was strictly controlled by the pharaoh, who was paid all the produce, and who then redistributed it to people according to class. The presence of coins, or some means of exchange, might suggest that at one level normal trade was taking place.

Source 1
The second part of the country has been taken over by the kings for their revenues, out of which they pay the cost of their wars, support the splendour of their court, and reward with fitting gifts any who have distinguished themselves; and they do not swamp the private citizens by taxation, since their income from these revenues gives them a great amount.

Diodorus Siculus (1st century BC): 253

Source 4
The women go to the market and carry on trade, while the men remain at home and weave.

Herodotus (c. 440 BC): 90

Questions

1. When were coins used in Egypt (see source 5 and the timeline)?
2. How did they buy and sell before coins (see source 6)?
   Look at the people shown in these three paintings.
3. Why might some of them be kneeling?
4. What are they bringing?
5. What do all the sources show about how much the pharaoh controlled the economy?
SHEET 4: WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM TOMB PAINTINGS ABOUT EGYPTIAN FOOD?

We are lucky to have a lot of archaeological evidence about how the ancient Egyptians lived. These tomb paintings have a lot of detail about their diet.

**Task**

Study these paintings from the tomb of Nebamun and make a list of all the different types of food and drink that the Egyptians had.

*Sources 1 to 7: Paintings from the tomb of Nebamun, Egypt, c. 1350 BC*  
*British Museum*
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SHEET 5: HOW FAR DOES OTHER EVIDENCE SUPPORT THE PAINTINGS ABOUT EGYPTIAN FOOD?

Paintings can sometimes be misunderstood, so it is important for historians to look at a range of evidence before coming to conclusions. See whether these sources help you better understand what the Egyptians did for food.

Source 4

And as to their diet, it is as follows: they eat bread, making loaves of maize, and they drink a wine made out of barley, for they don’t have vines in their land. Some of their fish they dry in the sun and then eat them without cooking, others they eat cured in brine. They eat quails and ducks and small birds without cooking, after first curing them; and everything else which they have belonging to the class of birds or fishes, except those that they regard as sacred, they eat roasted or boiled.

Herodotus (c. 440 BC): 104

Source 7

It is certain that Egyptians gather in fruit from the earth with less effort than any other men and also with less effort than the other Egyptians; for they do not have to break up furrows with a plough, nor hoe, nor do any other of those jobs which other farmers have to do; but when the river has come up by itself and watered their fields, and after watering has left them again, then each man sows his own field and turns into it pigs. And when he has trodden the seed into the ground by means of the pigs, after that he waits for the harvest. And when he has threshed the corn by means of the pigs, then he gathers it in.

Herodotus (c. 440 BC): 83

Task

Link each of these bits of evidence with details from the tomb paintings, e.g. the hooks might go with the fish by showing how they caught it and proving that they ate it.

Questions

1. How reliable are these pieces of evidence?
2. How easy was it to get food in ancient Egypt?
SHEET 6: WHAT DIFFERENT CRAFTS AND TRADES DID THE EGYPTIANS HAVE?

Ancient Egyptians lived in a settled, urban society. One of the ways we can tell this is by looking at the range of specialised crafts that they practised. These objects reveal much information.

Task

Link each of the objects with one of these written descriptions:

- Linen mummy wrapping
- Wooden figure
- Pottery jar
- Bronze mirror
- Wooden comb
- Gold amulet
- Wooden furniture
- Limestone relief
- Wax figure
- Reed pen box
- Copper razor
- Wooden toy
- Wooden gaming pieces
- Bronze sword
- Kohl jar
- Headrest
- Linen cloth
- Painting

Questions

What can you tell about life in ancient Egypt from these objects?

Task

All these goods were made by specialised craftsmen. Name as many different ancient Egyptian trades as you can from the evidence of these objects.
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