

## ANCIENT EGYPT FASCINATING FACTS

Ancient Egyptians made the first calendar based on the sun's movement, by observing the annual flooding of the Nile, with 365 days in a year.

Ancient Egyptian wealth indicator: Number of cattle + peasants working on your land (women did not count!) = wealth

Black is the colour of life in Egypt, this is because the rich dark soil around the Nile (known as 'Keme' or 'Black Land') was the best for growing crops.

### ILLUSTRATIONS

- 1 - Section of head-dress
- 2 - Mummy
- 3 - Wood model of servant
- 4 - Shabti
- 5 - Pre-dynastic pot

**P**haraohs ruled all of this desert land from around 3,000 BC to 30 BC. This period is defined as 'Ancient Egypt'. Then, it was the wealthiest country in the world, with merchants bringing in ivory, incense, precious stones, greyhounds, baboons... The Ancient Egyptians had a well-organised army and highly skilled craftspeople.

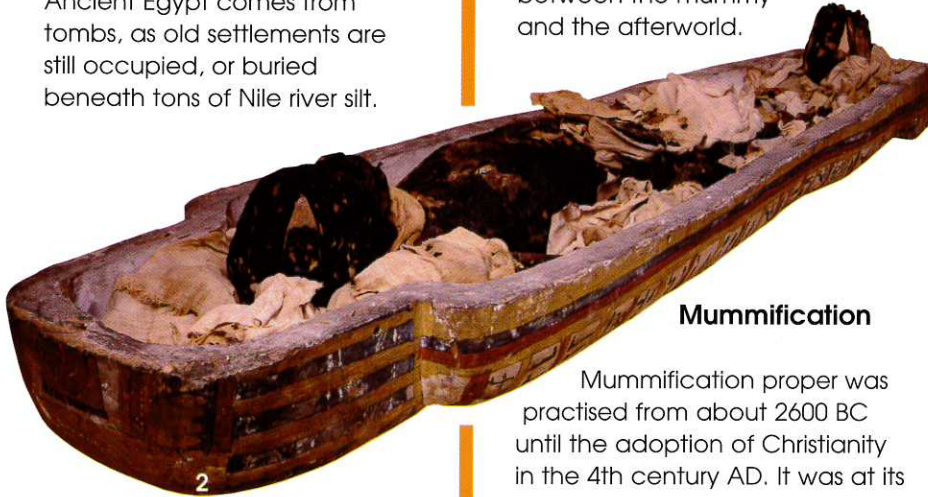
Most of our knowledge of life in Ancient Egypt comes from tombs, as old settlements are still occupied, or buried beneath tons of Nile river silt.

workforce: farmers would build during quiet seasons.

The 'Pyramid Age' lasted about 1,000 years. Later pharaohs, including Tutankhamun (1361-52 BC), were buried in tombs.

### Mummies

The Egyptians believed the body must be preserved to provide a resting place for the Ba, or soul, which passed to and fro between the mummy and the afterworld.



**Mummification**

Mummification proper was practised from about 2600 BC until the adoption of Christianity in the 4th century AD. It was at its peak during the New Kingdom period:-

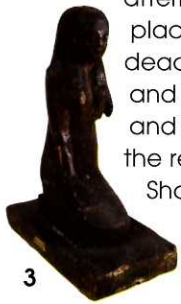
The brain was removed and thrown away. The internal organs, except the heart, were removed, treated with natron (a naturally occurring salt) and placed in four 'canopic' jars.

The jar lids were carved to represent the four sons of Horus, who protected the organs within. The jar with the human head held the liver, a baboon held the lungs, a jackal held the stomach and a falcon held the intestines. The body was dehydrated with natron and its cavities packed with linen and sawdust. After treatment with ointments, spices and resins, the body was wrapped in bandages to keep its human shape. The ceremony of 'opening the mouth' was essential to allow the dead to eat, drink and move in the afterlife.

### THE EGYPTIAN WAY OF DEATH

The Egyptians believed in the afterlife. Possessions were placed in the tombs for the dead to enjoy. Wall-paintings and models of food, animals and servants represented the real thing in tombs.

Shabtis (small mummy-like figures) were there to do the work of the deceased. Each gang of shabtis had an overseer, generally carrying a whip.



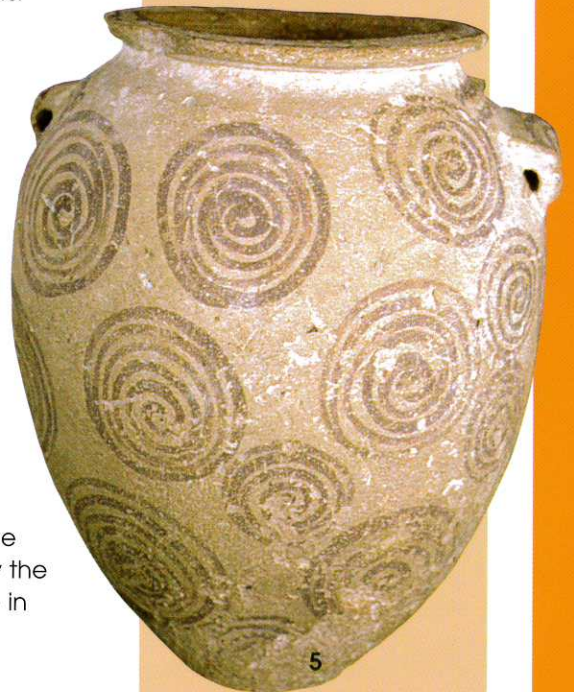
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### Pyramids

The first pyramid was built as a gigantic stairway for Pharaoh Djoser (died c.2630 BC) for him to climb to join the sun-gods; later pyramids had the true sloping sides. They were probably built by a conscripted



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## ANCIENT EGYPT FASCINATING FACTS

The scarab, or dung beetle, lays its eggs in dung and then rolls it into balls. The young beetle emerging from the dung symbolised resurrection.

Hieroglyphics can be read from right to left, left to right or in vertical columns. The direction for reading is determined by the way in which signs representing living creatures are facing.

The first ever recorded strike was in Egypt, pyramid builders sat in the shade of the pyramid until they were paid.

Animals which the ancient Egyptians identified with their gods were mummified, including dogs, crocodiles, cats, hawks and ibises. Thousands of animals may have been bred to

provide animal mummies used by pilgrims to the temples as offerings.

### The Maidstone Mummy, c.700-650 BC

She is 'The Lady of the House, Ta-Kesh, Daughter of the Doorkeeper of Osiris, Pa-Muta; her mother Lady of the House, Shy' (translation of hieroglyphics on the coffin).

This 2,700 year old mummy was brought to England in the 1820s. In 1843 it was opened by Samuel Birch of the British Museum, and a local doctor - HW Diamond - who made the cuts (still visible) in the skull and abdomen. Generally a mummy would have an inner and outer coffin; only the inner wood coffin reached the Museum in the 19th century.

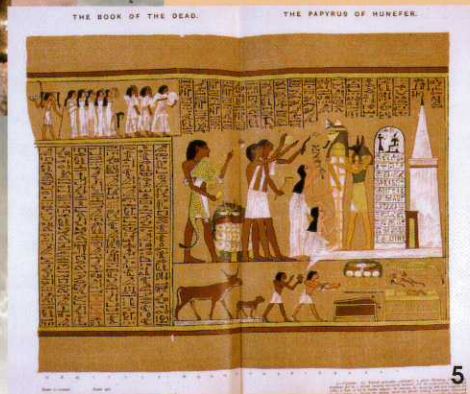
### Spells

Spells written on the coffin protected the dead from the dangers in the underworld (such as lakes of fire, snakes and executioners), these developed into the 'Book of the Dead', which also helped the dead through the 'Weighing of the Heart' ceremony, when their past was judged. A scarab beetle amulet over the mummy's heart,

inscribed with a spell, kept the heart from making confessions. Failure meant no afterlife. Texts from the book written on mud bricks, papyrus, linen etc. were buried with the dead; and stone tablets (stela) were inscribed with an offering formula to ensure provision of food, drink etc. in the afterlife.

### EGYPTIAN RELIGION

In the beginning every local tribe had several gods and over 2000 of these have been recorded. Some of these went on to become more widely worshipped - there was a temple of Isis in 3rd century London. The pharaoh was believed to be an immortal god, protected by Horus who was son of Osiris (god of the Underworld, the Nile flood and vegetation) and Isis (the divine mother, moon goddess, sister and wife of Osiris).



### ILLUSTRATIONS

- 1 - Eye of Horus amulet
- 2 - Stone stela
- 3 - Scarab amulets
- 4 - Statue of Osiris
- 5 - Book of the Dead