Ancient Egypt

4.1 Overview

4.1.1 LINKS WITH OUR TIMES

Modern Egypt is one of the world’s poorer countries. Unlike several other Middle Eastern nations, it lacks oil and other natural resources. Despite such disadvantages, until recently, vast numbers of visitors flocked to Egypt to marvel at traces of its glorious ancient past. They looked in awe at the pyramids at Giza and the royal tombs in the Valley of the Kings; they puzzled over questions such as why the ancient Egyptians were so fascinated by death and how the mighty pyramids were built without any modern construction devices.

Since Egypt erupted in political conflict, in early 2011, visitor numbers have fallen. As you can judge from the image, Egypt is now considered a very volatile place. There have been many oppressive acts by its authorities, violent clashes between protestors and police and soldiers, and several terrorist attacks. However, despite the great dangers, archaeologists have carried on the exciting work of discovering Egypt’s tombs, mummies and other clues about the fascinating ancient history of this land.

BIG QUESTIONS

As you work through this topic, look for information that will help you to answer these questions:
1. How did ancient Egypt’s natural environment influence its civilisation?
2. How was ancient Egypt organised and ruled?
3. What was the influence in ancient Egypt of religious ideas and beliefs about afterlife?
4. What can ancient sources tell us about life in ancient Egypt?
5. What are the legacies of ancient Egypt?

STARTER QUESTIONS

1. For how long was Egypt a great ancient civilisation (see timeline)?
2. How do you think the pyramids could have been built?
3. Have you heard of hieroglyphics (the ancient Egyptian writing system in which pictures and symbols represent words and sounds)?
4. Have you read, heard or seen any stories about Egyptian mummies?
4.2 Examining the evidence

4.2.1 How do we know about ancient Egypt?
As you study the pictures in this spread, you will notice many clues about life in ancient Egypt. This is because the ancient Egyptians left a huge amount of primary source evidence behind them. As in Mesopotamia, most Egyptian houses were made of mud bricks so they left few traces, but their pyramids, temples and tombs were made of stone. The pyramids and tombs of Egyptian kings and nobles contained mummies and brilliant artworks, including statues of gods, models and wall paintings. Many of these are very well preserved. There are also colossal stone statues of pharaohs and magnificent painted wall panels.

**Ancient Egyptian written primary sources**
Egyptians used writing, in the form of symbols called hieroglyphs, from about 3100 BCE but from the fourth century to the nineteenth century CE no-one knew how to read ancient Egyptian. Thanks to the discovery in 1798 of the Rosetta Stone and the dedicated work of two nineteenth-century scientists, the code was broken and scholars can now read the many primary source records of ancient Egypt (see 4.8 Write like an Egyptian).

**Ancient secondary sources**
Some ancient written sources on Egypt are really secondary sources. This is because they were written a very long time after the events they describe. Among them are the writings of the Greek historian Herodotus (c. 484–420 BCE), who travelled to Egypt to gather information. They also include the surviving pages of a history of Egypt written by an Egyptian priest called Manetho around 300 BCE.

**SOURCE 1** The gold mask that was found covering the face of the mummy of the New Kingdom pharaoh Tutankhamen

**SOURCE 2** A painted limestone panel showing the great New Kingdom pharaoh Rameses II striking bound prisoners of war.
A wall painting from the tomb of Nebamun at Thebes (c. 1400 BCE), showing him hunting birds in the marshes with a throwing stick. With him are his wife, daughter and cat.

4.2 PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING
1. What types of sources survived from ancient Egypt?
2. Why did those sources survive while others left few traces?
3. Why don’t historians consider ancient written sources by, for example, Herodotus and Manetho to be primary sources for ancient Egypt?

USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE
4. Look closely at SOURCE 1 and explain what it can tell us about:
   a. the wealth and power of the rulers of ancient Egypt
   b. the skills of ancient Egyptian artists and craftspeople
   c. preparations that were made for death in ancient Egypt.

5. Study SOURCE 2.
   a. Describe the main features of this painted panel.
   b. How can you tell that the men on the left are prisoners?
   c. Why do you think the pharaoh is depicted as being much bigger than his captured enemies?
   d. Why do you think an Egyptian ruler would want to be shown killing his prisoners?

   a. Describe the details of the painting.
   b. What are the people standing on?
   c. What is Nebamun using to hunt birds?
   d. Compare and contrast this weapon with an Indigenous Australian boomerang.
   e. What might we learn from this painting about a favourite Egyptian pastime?

7. Write a summary of all you have discovered about ancient Egypt from these three sources.
4.3 The gift of the Nile

4.3.1 Floods and irrigation

Like many other ancient civilisations, Egypt developed along a river — the Nile. The waters of the Nile are what made civilisation possible in Egypt’s hot, dry, sun-baked land. The Nile is formed by the joining of two rivers, the White Nile and the Blue Nile, which flow north from the wet highlands of central Africa. The Nile flows through the deserts and finally empties through a long delta into the Mediterranean Sea. The people of ancient Egypt lived in ‘the Black Lands’, the river’s floodplain. These parts of the land were covered by water whenever the Nile flooded.

Each year, between June and September, heavy rains in central Africa caused the Nile to flood. The annual flooding provided a layer of fertile soil. Without this flooding, civilisation would not have developed in Egypt. People began to live along the Nile from about 5000 BCE. Its waters, the plants that grew in the soil on its banks, and the birds, fish and mammals that lived around it provided all that they needed (see SOURCE 3 in 4.2 Examining the evidence). They domesticated cattle, sheep, goats and geese and grew crops in the floodplains.

The river provided reeds to make boats, roofs, baskets and papyrus, and a transport route for people and goods. The annual flooding also helped set Egypt’s calendar. The Inundation, the period of flooding, was regarded as the start of each year.

To use the Nile’s waters more efficiently, the Egyptians invented a way of irrigating their crops by lifting the water from the river and moving it through ditches in their fields. To do this they used a bucket device called a shadoof, a method that is still used today. Most importantly, irrigation enabled part of the population to produce enough food for the whole population. This freed others to do more specialised work.

DID YOU KNOW?

Away from the floodplain of the Nile, 90 per cent of Egypt is desert. The arid deserts provided little to sustain the Egyptians, but deserts were difficult to cross and for centuries they helped Egypt to develop its civilisation without the constant threat of foreign invasion.

SOURCE 1 From The Histories, written by the ancient Greek historian Herodotus, who visited Egypt in 475 BCE

…it is clear to any intelligent observer . . . that the Egypt to which we sail nowadays is . . . the gift of the Nile . . . When the Nile overflows, the whole country is converted into a sea, and the towns, which alone remain above water, look like islands. At these times water transport is used all over the country instead of merely along the course of the river.

4.3.1 Activities

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING
1. Complete the following sentences by choosing the correct words from the alternatives in brackets:
   a. The Nile is formed by the joining of two rivers, the (Green/White) Nile and the (Blue/Black) Nile.
   b. Ancient Egyptians lived in the (deserts/floodplains).
   c. The Inundation was the period of (drought/flooding).
   d. Egypt’s natural defences were provided by (mountains/deserts).
2. Suggest why the lands along the Nile’s floodplain were called ‘the Black Lands’.

USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE
3. Read SOURCE 1.
   a. What do you think Herodotus meant when he called the civilisation of ancient Egypt ‘the gift of the Nile’?
   b. Make a list of other ways in which the flooding of the Nile affected the lives of the ancient Egyptians.
4. Using SOURCE 2, locate the delta of the Nile and describe its shape and the geographical features that would have made it a good place for farming.
4.3 Putting it all together

Identifying continuity and change

1. Explain how cultivating plants and domesticating animals would have transformed the lives of people living along the Nile.

Analysing cause and effect

2. In what sense can the Nile be considered to have contributed to Egypt’s success in developing a civilisation?
4.4 The people of Egypt

4.4.1 The structure of ancient Egyptian society

Ancient Egyptian society was layered like a pyramid (see **source 1**). At the top was the pharaoh, who was considered both a king and a god. Beneath him was the vizier (prime minister) who was in charge of almost everything. Next in importance were the nobles, priests, officials and scribes. Then there were the common people, peasants and slaves.

**Nobles, priests, officials and scribes**

Nobles formed a wealthy class in ancient Egyptian society. These landowning families lived privileged lives while their large estates were farmed by peasants and labourers. Priests controlled the temples and this role gave them enormous power. The work of administering Egypt and ensuring that the pharaoh's wishes were carried out was done by officials. Most high officials were nobles but some were common people who worked their way up as scribes. Egypt's many scribes, like the man in **source 2**, ranked below the ruling classes of nobles, priests and officials but above the common people. Because they had been trained to read and write scribes were employed to keep state records including taxes.

**SOURCE 1** A social pyramid showing where each class ranked in ancient Egypt

**SOURCE 2** A scribe sitting with a papyrus on his lap. It took 12 years of study to become a scribe. This statue depicts Nespekasut, a senior scribe of Karnak, in Upper Egypt.

**The ordinary people**

Among the common people, **artisans** formed a large group. Young men learned their craft from their fathers. Craftsmen included:

- stonemasons, who made temples, tombs, statues and monuments
- painters, who decorated temples, tombs, coffins and canopic jars (see 4.7 Mummies unwrapped)
- woodworkers, who carved furniture and other objects
- wigmakers, who made wigs and false beards
- metalworkers
- weavers
- musical instrument makers
- paper makers, who made sheets of papyrus
- jewellers.
Because money was not used in Egypt until the fourth century BCE, craftsmen were paid in food and beer.

Among the more prosperous commoners were merchants, who conducted trade. Peasants were by far the largest group. They were mostly tenant farmers who worked the land owned by the pharaoh, priests and nobles. Most of what they produced went to their landlords or was paid to the state in taxes. Usually their lives were an unchanging cycle of ploughing, planting, harvesting and other farm work.

During the flood they were sometimes expected to labour on the construction of pyramids, temples or other building projects of the pharaoh. There were also many labourers, servants and some slaves.

**SOURCE 3** An Egyptian papyrus depicting farming work

**4.4.1 Activities**

**CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING**

1. What was the role of a vizier in ancient Egypt?
2. What were the sources of the power of nobles and priests?
3. Name three types of artisans. Suggest which artisans might have been regarded as most important and why.

**USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE**

4. Using SOURCE 1 and other information from this subtopic, identify barriers that existed to moving upwards in ancient Egyptian society and how people lower down the social scale might have felt about such barriers.

5. Look at SOURCE 2.
   a. Describe how this scribe is portrayed.
   b. Explain how a person may have become a scribe.
   c. Imagine that an ordinary family in ancient Egypt had two sons, one of whom became a scribe. Compare and contrast the lives of the two sons.

6. Study SOURCE 3. Describe what is happening in this scene and explain what evidence it provides for the everyday lives of the peasants.
4.4.2 Everyday life

All houses were made of mud bricks, but while nobles lived in great houses, artisans, peasants and labourers lived in simple huts. Their furniture was made of wood and rushes, and they stored food in pottery jars. From the evidence in sculptures and wall paintings we know quite a lot about people's appearance. Men are depicted wearing tunics or kilts. Women are shown wearing straight dresses (see SOURCE 4). The same sources tell us that Egyptians took part in hunting, enjoyed music and dancing, and played several kinds of board games (see SOURCE 5). Children appear to have been valued and loved; they were seen as the main reason for marriage.

SOURCE 4 A painted limestone statue of a woman, called Merseankh, and her husband, Raherka, from about 2500–2350 BCE

SOURCE 5 This ancient Egyptian game box from c. 1400–1200 BCE includes a playing board and a drawer to hold playing pieces.

Food and drink

Ordinary Egyptians had simple foods. They ate bread, onions and other vegetables, with occasional fish or meat, and drank beer. The ruling classes, however, enjoyed much more. In the tomb of one noblewoman, archaeologists discovered a meal that was meant for the afterlife. It consisted of porridge, fish, pigeon, quails, beef, bread, fruits, berries and cheese, with wines and beer to accompany the meal.

Stories, rituals and festivals

Stories played a big part in people's lives. The Egyptians shared myths about their gods, tales of travel and adventure, and stories designed to teach wisdom. Their religion featured many rituals and festivals. In the villages people worshipped their favourite gods at local shrines. At home, families worshipped at household shrines. In the temples, priests performed rituals. Temples, believed to be the dwellings of gods, were not public places. However, during festivals the ordinary people were permitted to take part in temple rituals. These festivals ranged from local celebrations to national events. Among them was the Festival of Opet, in which sacred barges were towed up the Nile while crowds applauded and danced along the river banks.

DID YOU KNOW?

Ancient Egyptians seasoned their food with salt and sweetened it with honey. Discoveries of children's toys form ancient Egypt include models of animals, dolls with movable legs and arms, leather balls and spinning tops.
4.4.3. Everyday lives of women in ancient Egypt

Women in ancient Egypt did not have the same rights as men. In all lower-class families, women were responsible for preparing food, including making bread and beer, and caring for children. In peasant families they also worked in the fields. They were usually not taught to read and write. Apart from work as singers, dancers, musicians, servants, nurses and funeral mourners (people paid to weep and wail at funerals), few careers were open to women. Despite this, they had more freedom than in most other ancient societies, where women were treated as the property of men.

SOURCE 6 Mourners painted on the tomb of the vizier Ramoseh

Upper-class women

In Egypt a woman’s rank in society depended on her husband’s rank, but high status could also be achieved by the mother of a high-ranking son. Wives and daughters of pharaohs and nobles led privileged lives with fine clothes and many servants. By the beginning of the New Kingdom, about 1550 BCE, such women could inherit, own and sell property. They could work as part-time priestesses and decide to marry or divorce. However, marriages between wealthy families were often treated as business arrangements and some wealthy men had several wives. Frequently pharaohs married their own sisters but they had other wives as well.

SOURCE 7 From a New Kingdom love poem in which the poet expresses his feelings for a woman he has been parted from for a week

She is more to me than the collected writings . . .
When I see her, then I am well.
If she opens her eye, my body is young again;
If she speaks, then I am strong again;
When I embrace her, she drives all evil away from me . . .
But she has gone forth from me for seven days!

DID YOU KNOW?

Upper-class women in ancient Egypt possessed a great range of cosmetics and jewellery. Items found include pots for holding kohl (eye shadow), hair curlers, hair tweezers, combs, cosmetics boxes, rings, bead necklaces and collars, amulets, and palettes and stones for grinding cosmetics.
Some upper-class women became high officials. A woman named Nebet became vizier under Pharaoh Pepy I. Another upper-class Egyptian woman who had great influence was Nefertiti. She was the main wife of Pharaoh Akhenaten (ruled c. 1351–1336 BCE). Queens were less important than pharaohs, but images depict Nefertiti as a very beautiful queen who accompanied her husband at ceremonies and on official occasions. Some images even show her in a war chariot.

Hatshepsut — a very significant woman

Only a few queens ever ruled in their own right. The most famous of those who did was Hatshepsut. If a pharaoh died while the heir to his throne was still very young, the highest ranking royal wife could act as regent (someone who rules on behalf of the heir until he is old enough to take the throne). Hatshepsut became regent because when her husband (and brother) Pharaoh Thutmose II died, Thutmose III, the heir to the throne, was only three years old. A few years later she had herself crowned as pharaoh. She ruled Egypt from about 1479 to 1458 BCE and appears to have led Egypt's armies in at least one war.

4.4.3 Activities

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING
1 What careers were open to women in ancient Egypt?
2 How much equality did women have with men within:
   a lower class families
   b the upper classes?

USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE
3 Look closely at the mourners in SOURCE 6.
   a Analyse this source to explain what it can tell us about ancient Egyptian society and women's roles in it.
   b Working with a partner, design a job advertisement for an ancient Egyptian mourner.
   c How do you think Egyptian women might have actually felt about such work?

4.4 PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE
1 Using SOURCES 6 and 7 as your evidence, form a hypothesis about relationships between men and women in ancient Egypt. What other kinds of evidence would you need to support conclusions?
2 It has been estimated that at least 95 per cent of ancient Egyptians were illiterate. This percentage probably included all Egyptians below the rank of scribes. Explain what problems this would pose for historians trying to discover the thoughts and feelings of ordinary Egyptians.

IDENTIFYING CONTINUITY AND CHANGE
3 Draw two columns comparing rights and opportunities of women and men in ancient Egypt and identify what each might have done in their everyday lives.

4.5 Pharaoh rules!

4.5.1 King Narmer and the rise of the pharaohs

The wealthiest, most powerful person in ancient Egypt was the pharaoh. He had the support of an army and a host of priests, scribes and officials, but the pharaoh alone decided how Egypt would be ruled. The people saw him as a god.

Ancient Egypt was once divided into two kingdoms — Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt. Each was ruled by a king. The king of Lower Egypt had his capital in Buto, and the king of Upper Egypt, in Hierakonpolis. Around 3100 BCE it is thought that these kingdoms were united under King Narmer. He set up his capital in Memphis.
During the next 2700 years, Egypt's history was divided into a number of distinct periods. Three of the more important of these — times when Egypt was united and powerful, with a rich culture — are called the Old Kingdom, the Middle Kingdom and the New Kingdom. During these three kingdoms, Egypt's rulers (eventually called pharaohs) came from some 30 dynasties. When a pharaoh died, his eldest son became the next pharaoh, unless a man from another family seized control and started a new dynasty. Sometimes the pharaoh's wife or eldest daughter ruled for a time if the eldest son was very young.

SOURCE 1 The king of Upper Egypt wore a white crown, and the king of Lower Egypt, a red crown. Narmer's crown was said to be a mix of both, signifying a united Egypt.

4.5.1 Activities
CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING
1 Fill in the gaps in this passage.
   It is thought that King Narmer united Egypt in ____ BCE and set up a new capital in _____. In Egypt's long history, the three periods called kingdoms were times when the country was ____ and _____.

2 How did someone become a pharaoh?

SEQUENCING CHRONOLOGY
3 Examine the timeline in the topic opener.
   a Find the years during which each of the following periods existed: the Old Kingdom, the Middle Kingdom and the New Kingdom.
   b Explain how the other periods were different to these three kingdoms.

USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE
4 Explain how and why Narmer's crown (SOURCE 1) combined features of the crowns of Lower Egypt and Upper Egypt.
4.5.2 Power and responsibility

Heavenly powers

The ancient Egyptians saw their pharaoh as a man with supernatural powers. He was believed to descend from the sun god, Amun-Ra, and to have the sky god, Horus, living within him.

Egyptians believed that the laws the pharaoh made applied to the whole universe. They believed he made the Nile River flood and helped the land to produce good harvests. As a mark of respect, they did not call him by his name. Rather, they used the word ‘pharaoh’, which in ancient Egyptian meant ‘great house’.

Earthly responsibilities

The people of ancient Egypt expected their pharaoh to protect and feed them, and to maintain a fair justice system and a peaceful society. He drew up the laws of the land and controlled the government and the army. In artworks, he was often portrayed as a military hero (see SOURCE 3). Exactly what laws the pharaohs made for their people is something for which we have very little evidence. No written code of laws has survived from ancient Egypt. Nor is there any evidence of a system of law courts. Rather, law cases appear to have been judged by officials who had many other responsibilities. He was also in charge of temple building, tax collection, mines, irrigation, trade, important religious ceremonies and the appointment of officials and priests. His huge wealth came from the labour and produce that the people provided as their taxes. Thousands of ordinary people worked the huge farms he owned or helped in the running of his palace. There they worked as cooks, cleaners, dancers, stable workers, craftsmen, weavers and wig-makers.

SOURCE 2 The power of the pharaoh was evident in his appearance. For example, he often wore a false beard and a bull’s tail (both symbols of pharaonic power), and carried a flail (the symbol of Osiris) and a shepherd’s crook (the hieroglyphic sign for a crook meant ‘king’).

SOURCE 3 A gold emblem showing Pharaoh Tutankhamen returning from war. This was just one of many priceless objects found in his tomb.
An obedient, contented society?
Inscriptions and paintings in tombs of pharaohs and officials depict a harmonious society in which ordinary Egyptians worked contentedly in the fields or at their skilled crafts under the rule of the pharaoh. It was an image of a stable society in which everyone accepted their place and never questioned those above them. But how realistic was this?

Some text inscribed on pieces of pottery tell a different story. It is the story of the world’s first recorded industrial dispute and it took place during the reign of Pharaoh Rameses III. It tells of tomb builders walking off the job of constructing the royal tomb after the officials in charge failed to pay them the food and supplies to which they were entitled.

**SOURCE 4** An ancient scribe’s record of the strike of workers employed to construct and decorate the tomb of Rameses III

[The] gang walked out [of the tomb] because they were hungry; there is no wood, no vegetables, no fish. So they went to consult the magistrate ... who declared, “[the people of the Tomb]” are in the right.

### 4.5.2 Activities

**CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING**
1. In what ways did ancient Egyptians associate their pharaoh with gods?
2. What was the source of the pharaoh’s wealth?
3. Create a mind map to outline the powers and responsibilities of a pharaoh.

### 4.5 PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

**USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE**
1. Explain what conclusions you can draw from **SOURCES 1, 2 and 3** about the way that pharaohs wanted to be seen and thought of by their people.
2. Use the internet to locate images of some of the treasures of the pharaohs. Several museums hold such objects and you can view them online. Present two images to the class as a data show with an explanation of their importance in representing the power of pharaohs.

**IDENTIFYING CONTINUITY AND CHANGE**
3. Analyse **SOURCE 4** using the following questions.
   a. For what event does this source provide evidence?
   b. What were the grievances of the striking tomb workers?
   c. How do you think the workers regarded the pharaoh’s officials who were responsible for paying them?
   d. How does this source contradict the image in other ancient sources of an unchanging, contented society?

### 4.6 Gods and the afterlife

#### 4.6.1 The journey to the afterlife
Death was a very important event for ancient Egyptians. It connected life on Earth with life ever after, so a lot of effort was spent preparing for it. This focus on death has been very valuable for historians, because most of what we know about ancient Egypt comes from what has been found in tombs. Many of the *deities* of ancient Egypt, whether good or bad, played a role in a person’s journey to the afterlife.

The ancient Egyptians believed the next world was a fantastic place. However, it was a long way away, and reaching it was not easy. First, the dead person had to cross a wide river. Then he or she had to chant secret spells to get through seven gates guarded by fierce monsters, all
the while looking out for traps set by evil gods and attacks by savage crocodiles and venomous snakes. Then the dead person’s heart was weighed on scales against a feather to see if it was ‘heavy with sin’. Forty-two judges decided the outcome.

**SOURCE 1** Scenes from the *Book of the Dead of Hunefer*, which dates from around 1310 BCE. It is painted on papyrus. The Egyptians made books of the dead to protect their owners from the perils of the journey to the afterlife. If a heart was found to be ‘as light as a feather’, its owner joined the god Osiris in the afterlife. If heavy, it was chewed up by a monster god that was a cross between a lion or cheetah, a hippopotamus and a crocodile.

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**Preparing for the journey of the soul**

The ancient Egyptians believed that a dead person had a number of souls. Two of these were the *ka* and the *ba*. The *ka*, the person’s life force, stayed within the tomb, getting strength from the food and drink left there. The *ba*, the person’s character, set off on its journey towards the afterlife, returning to the tomb to rest each night. To do these things, the soul needed a body. So dead people’s bodies were carefully preserved, or embalmed, so they did not rot. An embalmed body is called a mummy.

Mummies were buried with lots of the possessions the person’s soul might need in the afterlife. They included food and drink, clothing, perfume, furniture, jewellery and special charms called *amulets*. Sometimes small wooden or stone figures representing servants doing things such as making bread, ploughing a field or sailing a ship were placed in tombs. As well, prayers, hymns and magic spells from the 200 such texts in the *Book of the Dead* were often written on a scroll of papyrus and buried with the mummy or carved in hieroglyphs on the walls of the tomb. These texts were thought to protect the soul from evil and guide it through the afterlife.

After a dead person’s body was mummified, a funeral ceremony was held. The body was carried in a boat across the Nile and buried on the western bank, where the sun set. This was the direction in which the next world was believed to lie. Important people such as pharaohs were buried in elaborate underground tombs consisting of many rooms and tunnels. Poorer people were buried in the hot, dry sands to help preserve their bodies.
4.6.1 Activities

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. Beginning with ‘Step 1: The dead person’s body was embalmed’, list in chronological order each step it was believed an ancient Egyptian had to take to reach the afterlife.
2. Explain why ancient Egyptians made books of the dead.
3. What was the difference between the ka and the ba?
4. Why were mummies buried with possessions?

USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE

5. Analyse SOURCE 1 using the following questions.
   a. The figure on the far left is the dead person. Which of the steps you listed in answering question 1 is shown in this source?
   b. What is the god with the jackal’s head weighing on his scales?
   c. Why is he doing this?
   d. According to ancient Egyptian beliefs, will this dead person’s soul be allowed to enter the next world?
6. Explain why the figurines in SOURCE 2 would have been placed in a tomb.

4.6.2 The gods of the ancient Egyptians

There were many deities in ancient Egypt, each looking after some particular area of people’s lives. For example, the god Hopi was responsible for the Nile River. Some gods were portrayed as humans and some as animals. Others were a mixture of both — usually animal heads on human bodies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of god</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Associated animal or symbol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amun-Ra</td>
<td>God of creation; god of the sun and king of the gods</td>
<td>The sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osiris</td>
<td>God of the dead; god of the afterlife; a judge in the underworld</td>
<td>Pharaoh mummy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seth</td>
<td>God of confusion and chaos</td>
<td>Hippopotamus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isis</td>
<td>Mother goddess; goddess of fertility; wife of Osiris</td>
<td>Woman wearing a throne as a crown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horus</td>
<td>God of the sky; guardian of the pharaoh</td>
<td>Falcon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hathor</td>
<td>Goddess of beauty and love; goddess of the sky</td>
<td>Woman with cow horns on her head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoth</td>
<td>God of the scribes; god of wisdom and knowledge; god of time</td>
<td>Man having the head of an ibis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anubis</td>
<td>God of embalming; god of tombs and burials</td>
<td>Man having the head of a jackal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Herodotus observed how important cats were to the ancient Egyptians. They were thought to protect people’s homes. It is no wonder they were chosen as one of the animals to be associated with a god.

What happens when a house catches fire is most extraordinary: nobody takes the least trouble to put it out, for it is only the cats that matter; everyone stands in a row, a little distance from his neighbour, trying to protect the cats, who nevertheless slip through the line, or jump over it, and hurl themselves into the flames. This causes the Egyptians deep distress. All the inmates of a house where a cat has died a natural death shave their eyebrows …

4.6.2 Activities

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING
1. Which Egyptian deity (god) was linked to each of these animals: jackal, hippopotamus, falcon, ibis?
2. In what ways were the gods Anubis and Osiris particularly important in the journey to the afterlife?

USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE
3. According to Herodotus, SOURCE 3, how did ancient Egyptians regard cats? Why might they have been associated with the gods?

4.6 PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

IDENTIFYING CONTINUITY AND CHANGE
1. Using the sources and other information in this subtopic, identify the main differences between ideas about gods and life after death in ancient Egyptian religion and in any one of the religions that have large followings in the modern world.

ANALYSING CAUSE AND EFFECT
2. Explain how beliefs about the gods and the afterlife could have contributed to making ordinary Egyptians content with their position in society.

4.7 Mummies unwrapped

4.7.1 Dead mummies do tell tales!
The art and hieroglyphs found on the tomb walls of ancient Egyptians, and the mummies made of their dead bodies, have told historians a lot about the way of life of the ancient Egyptians.

At first, all ancient Egyptians buried their dead in the hot desert sands. However, in time wealthier Egyptians, especially pharaohs, began to build elaborate tombs. They would also mummify bodies so their souls would always have a ‘home’ to rest in, and be able to ‘eat and drink’.

Mummies allow us to have some idea of what famous pharaohs looked like. Scientists and historians can also find out details such as their age, their body shape, whether they had had children, what diseases and health problems they suffered — even, sometimes, what they died of. Researchers have found, for example, that cancer was probably rare or non-existent in ancient Egypt. On the other hand, broken and worn teeth were very common because of their crunching on sand grit and hard pieces of corn that were mixed up in bread.
SOURCE 1 Instructions to a priest for preparing a mummy

Step 1 Have your jackal mask ready so you can dress up as the god Anubis. Learn the prayers and magic spells from the Book of the Dead. You will need to chant these over the dead body as you work.

Step 2 Wash the dead body with water or palm wine.

Step 3 Use a long hook to pull out the brains through the left nostril. Throw them away.

Step 4 Cut open the left side of the stomach and remove the liver, lungs, intestines and stomach. Don’t remove the heart as it contains the personality.

Step 5 Cover the internal organs with natron to absorb all moisture. Rub the dried organs with oils and resin and wrap them in linen bandages. Then push them into canopic jars. Make sure you put each organ in the right jar.

Step 6 Cover the body with natron for 40 days to dry it out. Then rub the dried skin with palm oils and ointments. Pack the stomach cavity with perfumed linen and sew up the wound.

Step 7 Place a magic charm over the stomach wound and a scarab (beetle-shaped charm) over the heart. Then wrap the body with linen bandages dipped in gum. Wrap every part separately. You will need about 370 square metres of linen. Wrap amulets and magic charms such as ankh (𓊁) in with the bandages. The dead person’s soul will need these during its journey to the Kingdom of siris.

Step 8 Place a mask made from linen and glue over the person’s head and shoulders. If you have time, paint this or cover it in gold leaf. Also place a panel across the top part of the body, decorated with protective magic symbols and drawings.

Step 9 Place the wrapped mummy in a body-shaped coffin that has been decorated with jewels, paintings and inscriptions of spells. Paint the coffin so it looks a bit like the person when he or she was alive. Be flattering!

Step 10 Tell the relatives the mummy and the canopic jars are ready for burial. Your chief priest will need to accompany the funeral procession to the tomb so he can conduct the ceremony to open the mummy’s mouth. The person’s soul needs to talk in the afterlife. Remember, the professional mourners will be noisy!

SOURCE 2 The mummy of a six-year-old Egyptian boy
4.7.1 Activities

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING
1 Write the sentences hidden in the table below by correctly matching the phrases in the left and right columns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A mummy is</th>
<th>to assist the journey of the dead person's soul.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Natron is</td>
<td>to store organs that were removed from the body.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bodies were mummified</td>
<td>a body that has been preserved by drying and wrapping.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canopic jars were used</td>
<td>so that their souls would have a place to rest in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magic charms were wrapped in with the bandages</td>
<td>a mineral salt used to dry out dead bodies.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2 What have historians learned about ancient Egyptians by studying mummies?

USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE
3 Study SOURCE 2.
   a As the body of this boy is thousands of years old, what do you think would remain of it had it not been mummified?
   b Which dating technique could be used to tell how old it is?
   c What might you conclude about the social rank of the boy’s family from the fact that his face is painted with gold?
   d Explain what else his mummified body might be able to tell us about beliefs, values and practices associated with death and funerary customs in ancient Egypt.

4.7 PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE
1 Referring to SOURCES 1 and 2, give a brief explanation of what examining mummified bodies could tell us about differences between the social classes in ancient Egypt.

IDENTIFYING CONTINUITY AND CHANGE
2 Using the sources and other information in this subtopic, discuss as a class:
   a why preserving bodies was so important to ancient Egyptians
   b the similarities and differences between burial practices and ideas about death in ancient Egypt and the modern world.

4.8 Write like an Egyptian

4.8.1 Unlocking the mystery of hieroglyphs

The ancient Egyptians used writing over 5000 years ago, possibly as early as 3100 BCE. At first they used simple drawings and symbols to represent each word. They wrote on stone, pottery and paper, which they made from papyrus reeds. When the Greeks came to Egypt in the fourth century BCE and saw this writing on temple walls they called the symbols hieroglyphs, which meant ‘sacred writing’.

Around the fourth century CE, the secret of reading hieroglyphs was lost and it remained lost for centuries. But in 1799, a French soldier discovered a large black stone at the Egyptian town of Rosetta (now called Rashid). The stone had a written message carved in three different scripts. The scripts were: ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs; a later simplified form of hieroglyphs known as demotic; and, very importantly, ancient Greek, which could still be read and understood. So the ‘Rosetta stone’, as it became known, made it possible to unlock the mystery of hieroglyphs. Thanks to many years spent by Thomas Young, who was an English scientist, and a Frenchman named Jean François Champollion, the code was broken.
Scholars could now read the many records that the ancient Egyptians had written. These included the king lists, which were kept by priests and listed the pharaohs and how long they had reigned, as well as myths, legends, hymns, medical and legal documents, and even graffiti.

**SOURCE 1** The Rosetta Stone — interpretation of its hieroglyphs allowed scholars to learn much about ancient Egypt.

**4.8.1 Activities**

**CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING**

1. Approximately how long ago was writing first used in Egypt?
2. What is the meaning of the Greek word ‘hieroglyph’?

**USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE**

3. Look closely at **SOURCE 1**. Describe the feature of the Rosetta Stone that made it possible to unlock the mystery of hieroglyphs.

**4.8.2 Writing and reading in ancient Egypt**

The hieroglyphic ‘alphabet’ was much larger than ours — it was made up of more than 700 symbols. Some of these were simple drawings, such as a bird, and others were shapes, such as a semicircle. At first, each symbol stood for a word. As the language became more complex, some symbols came also to stand for other language elements besides single words, such as:

- the sound of a consonant (for example, the symbol for an owl also stood for the sound of the letter *m* )
- the sound of a syllable (for example, the symbol for a board game also stood for the sound of the letters *men* )
• ideas or actions (for example, the symbol for a leg shown twice stood for the idea of movement)
• signals to help the reader understand what was meant. A signal might be put at the end of a word so readers knew it had a different meaning from another of the same symbol. (If we used this technique today, we might place a sketch of a bus at the end of the word ‘trip’ to show that it meant ‘a journey’ and not ‘to fall over’.)

**Reading hieroglyphs**

At first, hieroglyphic symbols were laid out in columns. People read down each column, from top to bottom. From about 2000 BCE, the symbols were arranged in rows, more like our writing. Sometimes they were read from left to right (as we read) and other times from right to left. So that the reader knew where to start, a symbol of a person, animal or bird was put at the start or end of the line. The direction in which the symbol faced marked the start of a line. So, if a bird faced right, you would read the line from right to left.

Sometimes a symbol was placed above another, rather than to the side of it. In this event, the symbol on top was read first.

The name of a pharaoh was always enclosed in a cartouche — a bullet-shaped oval.

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**SOURCE 2** Translators have been able to link hieroglyphic symbols with most of the letters of our alphabet.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>a</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>c, k</th>
<th>d</th>
<th>e, y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
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<td>h</td>
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<tr>
<td>w</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>y</td>
<td>th</td>
<td>sh</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Symbols for single sounds**

**Symbols for syllables**

**Simpler forms**

Hieroglyphs were used mainly for religious purposes and in official documents. Priests and scribes could write and read using the system. This is why they can be found in tombs. But hieroglyphs took a lot of time to produce, so simpler, faster scripts were developed. Two other scripts — hieratic script (SOURCE 3) and demotic script — were used by ordinary people. Both these scripts used hieroglyphic symbols but in simpler forms.

**Writing classes**

Only boys were taught to read and write. At first they scratched messages on broken pieces of limestone and pottery. Once they could write, they used sheets of papyrus as paper and sharpened bits of reeds as pens. Their inks were solid blocks of powdered minerals, in different colours, which they mixed with water.
This papyrus sheet shows an Egyptian high priest presenting an offering to Osiris, the god of the afterlife. It contains both the hieroglyphic script (circled) and the simpler hieratic script (left and centre).

**4.8.2 Activities**

**CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING**
1. The first hieroglyphic symbols stood for complete words. How and why did that change?
2. How were boys taught to write?

**USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE**
3. Look closely at **SOURCE 3**.
   a. Which of the two scripts looks most like modern writing?

**4.8 PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER**

**USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE**
1. Use **SOURCE 2** to decode this message.

2. Work in small teams to make a sheet of ‘papyrus’, using **SOURCE 4** as a reference. Cut a sheet of thick blotting paper (or similar) into strips. Spray strips with a starch solution until they are wet but not sodden. Then lay them in two crossing layers and beat them together. (Place a sheet of lightly oiled greaseproof paper underneath so the paper can be removed once dry.) Polish the beaten sheet with a stone. Then pin down the corners (to stop curling) and place it in the sun to dry.
3. Use the piece of ‘papyrus’ you have made and the hieroglyphic symbols in **SOURCE 2** to create a message for other members of the class to translate. Put these on the display board.

**SOURCE 4** How the ancient Egyptians used the stalk of the papyrus reed to make paper

- **Step 1** Peel off each reed’s outer layer.
- **Step 2** Cut peeled reed into slices and soak these in water.
- **Step 3** Arrange two layers of wet reed slices as shown. (The starch in the reed works like a glue.) Hit them with a heavy mallet until they mash together.
- **Step 4** Polish the finished sheet with a smooth stone and allow to dry in the sun.

**IDENTIFYING CONTINUITY AND CHANGE**
4. Explain why ancient Egyptians gradually developed scripts that were more like modern writing than the earlier hieroglyphs.
4.9 Pyramid builders

4.9.1 Pyramids and hidden tombs

Built about 4500 years ago, the 80 or so pyramids in Egypt are the oldest human-made structures in the world. Of these, the famous three at Giza, near Cairo, are the most impressive. Their construction is an amazing feat of technology. Yet no-one knows for sure how they were built. The ancient Egyptians had only simple tools made of stone, wood and bronze. They had no cranes, computers, rock cutters or heavy earth-moving equipment.

**SOURCE 1** The pyramids at Giza in Egypt are the only remaining 'wonder' of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

From about 2500 BCE, the mummies and treasures of important people such as pharaohs were usually entombed in pyramids. This practice lasted only about 500 years, however, because robbers were a major problem. Thereafter, tombs for such people were dug into mounds and cliffs in the Valley of the Kings. But even these were not completely safe. Over time, they were all raided, except one — the tomb of the pharaoh Tutankhamen.

The Great Pyramid at Giza, built around 2550 BCE, was the tomb of the pharaoh Khufu. The other two were built for his son Khafre and grandson Menkure. The Great Pyramid, the biggest of the three, is close to 150 metres high and contains around 2 300 000 granite blocks, each of which weighs around 2.5 tonnes.

**Pyramid mysteries**

Some say the technology of the pyramids is so astonishing that they must have been built by an alien intelligence.
Another view is that those who built the pyramids at Giza, and the \textbf{Great Sphinx} that guards them, used knowledge and skills passed down from a very old but highly advanced civilisation that existed long before the Old Kingdom in Egypt. But archaeologists and historians prefer more scientific explanations.

\textbf{Heavenly sails}

One treasure the robbers missed in the Great Pyramid was a 43-metre-long boat, built to carry Khufu to the afterlife. It was not found until 1954. It had been broken into 1224 pieces before being packed into a rock cavity near the base of the pyramid. The cavity was so tightly sealed that when archaeologists broke into it they could still smell the cedar oil in the wood — after 4500 years!

\textbf{4.9.1 Activities}

\textbf{CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING}

1. Describe the tools and equipment used by ancient Egyptian pyramid builders.
2. Explain why the pharaohs stopped building pyramids after 500 years and switched to tombs dug into cliffs and mounds in the Valley of the Kings.

\textbf{USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE}

3. \textbf{SOURCE 1} shows the steps involved in the building of a pyramid. Select three of these steps and explain what tools and equipment would be needed by the workers in order to do their job.
4. Study \textbf{SOURCE 2}. Imagine that you are an ancient Egyptian who is planning to rob Khufu's tomb. Write a note to our accomplice explaining how to get into the pharaoh's burial chamber and what to look out for.

\textbf{4.9 PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER}

\textbf{USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE}

1. Use the internet to conduct research on the Giza pyramids. Prepare a short report on your findings. Include appropriate images.

\textbf{IDENTIFYING CONTINUITY AND CHANGE}

2. Imagine that you are a worker on the pyramid who had access to two pieces of modern equipment. Explain what modern equipment you would use and how that would change your task.

\textbf{4.10 Tutankhamen, Akhenaten and Nefertiti}

\textbf{4.10.1 An archaeologist's dream}

The discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamen was the key archaeological event of the twentieth century — but not because of the man or the size of his tomb. Tutankhamen was still a teenager when he died and the tomb had only four chambers. It was important because its contents were
untouched. More than 5000 objects were found, some of them priceless. We can only imagine what might have been found in the large tombs of more famous pharaohs if they had not been robbed.

In 1922 the British archaeologist Howard Carter found the tomb of Tutankhamen. He had looked for it for years in the Valley of the Kings without success. Then he decided to dig up an area around some old workers’ huts. To his excitement, a step was uncovered, carved into the rock. More digging revealed the sealed entrance to a passageway that carried the seal of Tutankhamen. Yet more digging to remove the tonnes of rubble in the passageway revealed the stone door to the tomb.

A hole was cut in the door and Carter inserted a lit candle into the darkness behind. He later said: ‘At first I could see nothing... But presently, as my eyes grew accustomed to the light, details of the room emerged slowly from the mist, strange animals, statues and gold — everywhere the glint of gold’.

SOURCE 1 The discovery of Tutankhamen’s tomb was described in the Illustrated London News of 9 December 1922 as ‘the most sensational Egyptological discovery of the century’.

The antechamber, the first chamber Carter entered, contained about 700 pieces of furniture including stools, beds and gold couches with animal heads, chairs, a chariot (in bits) and two black and gold life-size statues either side of the entrance. There were also jars of oil, lamps, vases, musical instruments, board games and clothing.

The side chamber contained about 600 items, including pieces of wooden furniture, baskets of food, jars of wine and oil.

About 200,000 tonnes of rubble had to be removed from this passageway to reach Tutankhamen’s tomb.

Inside the gold-covered burial chamber, some five metres long and 3.5 metres wide, were three other decorated chambers, each inside the other. The inner one was a stone sarcophagus, carved with Tutankhamen’s name. Inside this were three elaborately decorated body-shaped coffins. The inner one, made of 1100 kilograms of gold, contained Tutankhamen’s mummy.

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The face and shoulders of Tutankhamen’s mummy were covered with a mask of solid gold. It was decorated with blue glass and semi-precious stones such as turquoise and lapis lazuli.

The treasury chamber contained the pharaoh’s treasures. In it was the gold-lined shrine holding the canopic jars. Inside these jars were the pharaoh’s mumified internal organs. The chamber also contained gold statues including one of the god Anubis (who guarded the treasures), as well as boats, weapons, a golden throne and chests of jewellery.

4.10.1 Activities

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING
1. Why was Tutankhamen’s tomb such a rare and significant discovery?
2. How did Howard Carter find Tutankhamen’s tomb?
3. Explain the meaning of the following concepts and terms: burial chamber, treasury chamber, sarcophagus.

USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE
4. Using SOURCE 1, identify and select one of the types of items that were found in each of: the antechamber, the side chamber, the burial chamber, the treasury chamber. Explain what archaeologists and historians might discover about life in ancient Egypt from each of your four chosen items.
4.10.2 A new mystery?

The last significant pharaoh before Tutankhamen was Akhenaten, who became pharaoh in about 1353 BCE, under the name Amenhotep IV. In the fifth year of his reign he appears to have initiated a religious revolution in Egypt. He erected a new temple to the sun disk god Aten, changed his name to Akhenaten, meaning ‘he who serves Aten’ and decreed that in place of the many ancient gods of Egypt the people must worship only the Aten. Images of Akhenaten and many traces of the new religion were deliberately destroyed after his death.

Akhenaten’s first wife was Nefertiti. She was depicted as a very elegant and beautiful woman in a limestone bust dated c. 1340 BCE (see SOURCE 4) and in many images worshipping Aten with her husband.

Tutankhamen was married to the third daughter of Akhenaten and Nefertiti, and was only about nine years old when he became pharaoh in about 1336 BCE. Under Tutankhamen, Egypt made a complete return to the traditional gods. In inscriptions he was referred to as the good ruler who restored ‘what was ruined’. He died aged just 19 leaving no heir to the throne. The head of his mummy is shown in SOURCE 2. As revealed in SOURCE 5, it now appears that Tutankhamen might not have been alone in his tomb.

SOURCE 2 Head of the 19-year-old Pharaoh Tutankhamen

SOURCE 3 Translated inscription Tutankhamen had carved into a stone column, marking a return to the worship of many gods

I found the temples fallen into ruin, with their holy places overthrown and their courts overgrown with weeds. I reconstructed their sanctuaries, I endowed the temples and made them gifts of all precious things. I cast statues of the gods in gold and electrum, decorated with lapis lazuli and all fine stones.

SOURCE 4 A limestone bust of Nefertiti. It is dated c. 1340 BCE and is held in the Egyptian Museum Berlin.

SOURCE 6 ‘Egypt’s Queen Nefertiti may lie concealed in Tutankhamun’s tomb, say archaeologists’, ABC News, 5 October 2015

High resolution scans indicate that Queen Nefertiti is buried behind one or two hidden chambers in King Tutankhamun’s underground tomb, a British archaeologist says.

…

Dr Nicholas Reeves, from the University of Arizona, has been using radar and thermal imaging technology to examine Tutankhamun’s tomb …

He told a news conference in Cairo that he believes Tutankhamun’s mausoleum was originally occupied by Nefertiti.

…

His theory is that Nefertiti has lain undisturbed behind what he believes is a partition wall for more than 3,000 years.

The archaeologist believes the boy king, who died unexpectedly at 19, was buried in a rush in an underground burial chamber that was probably not intended for him.
4.10.2 Activities

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING
1. Who were Akhenaten and Nefertiti?
2. What big change did Akhenaten bring to Egyptian society and religion?

USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE
3. Where (see SOURCE 1) was Tutankhamen’s head (SOURCE 2) found?
4. Read Tutankhamen’s inscription in SOURCE 3.
   a. Who caused Egyptian religion to change before Tutankhamen’s reign?
   b. How would you account for the temples having ‘fallen into ruin’?
   c. Describe the effect of Tutankhamen’s reign on Egyptian religion and explain why Tutankhamen might have found it necessary to undertake the works referred to here.
5. Describe the way that Nefertiti is portrayed in SOURCE 4, the limestone bust.

4.10 PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE
1. Look again at SOURCE 1 and read SOURCE 5.
   a. What was Dr Reeves’s hypothesis about Nefertiti and Tutankhamen’s tomb?
   b. Where in SOURCE 1 do you think the partition wall and hidden chambers could possibly be?
2. What evidence did Reeves offer to support his hypothesis?
3. Reeves’s theory was immediately criticised by other archaeologists. What does this tell you about contestability in history?

IDENTIFYING CONTINUITY AND CHANGE
4. Work in small groups.
   a. Discuss and explore the way the ancient Egyptian people might have felt about Akhenaten’s religious changes.
   b. Explain why we have no real evidence of what ordinary Egyptians thought about these changes.
5. Based on what you now know about religious issues from the reign of Akhenaten to the death of Tutankhamen, write a paragraph explaining what we can conclude about change and continuity in this period of ancient Egyptian history.

DETERMINING HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE
6. Write a letter that Howard Carter could have written to his family in England the day after he saw the contents of Tutankhamen’s tomb by candlelight, explaining the historical significance of what he found.

4.11 Expansion and fall

4.11.1 From the Old Kingdom to the New Kingdom
Throughout history all empires have been created by force and all have eventually fallen. There were periods in Egypt’s long history when it suffered from civil wars and invasions. There were also times of strong governments that drove invaders out of the land and took control of other countries (see the timeline in the topic opener).

One of the worst times was the First Intermediate Period. The collapse of the Old Kingdom was followed by a century of bloodshed as nobles fought each other for control of the country. This made it easy for foreigners to move into the Nile Delta.

Contacts and conflicts
Egypt’s relations with other countries involved trade as well as war. Egypt traded with the Phoenicians and others to the north but its most important trade was with Nubia to the south. Egypt traded beer, wine, cheese, oil, linen and tools for Nubian copper, gold, jewels, ebony, ivory, exotic animals and slaves (see SOURCE 1). Yet Egypt was also often in conflict with Nubia. During the Middle Kingdom, it took part of Nubia and built forts to control the routes to its gold mines. Around the same time Egypt attacked the Libyans and other desert tribes to its north.
SOURCE 1 A scene on a wall of the tomb of Sobekhotep. It shows Africans, probably Nubians, carrying ebony logs, leopard skins, gold rings, giraffe tails and a live baboon.

SOURCE 2 Wooden models of Egyptian soldiers of the Middle Kingdom in four columns

DID YOU KNOW?

Egypt's army was at first made up mostly of peasants called up whenever needed. By New Kingdom times Egypt had a permanent army with chariots, archers and infantry armed with spears, battle axes, swords and daggers. It appears also to have included conscripted prisoners of war and foreign mercenaries.

mercenaries people who fight for a foreign country for money or other rewards
Wars of the New Kingdom

Egypt was again weak in the Second Intermediate Period when the Hyksos invaded from the north-east. This time was followed by the New Kingdom, the time of Egypt’s greatest power. At the start of this period, the armies of Pharaoh Ahmose defeated the Hyksos who had occupied Egypt. Ahmose also regained control of northern Nubia. In the fifteenth century BCE, Egypt defeated a coalition of Asiatic princes at the Battle of Megido. The territory occupied by modern Israel, Lebanon and Syria became part of the Egyptian Empire. Later pharaohs fought against the Hittites to keep control of these lands. In these wars Egypt plundered its defeated enemies and gained more wealth from the tribute (treasure, slaves and livestock) that had to be paid by conquered rulers.

Deepen and check your understanding of the topic with the following resources and auto-marked questions:

**Egypt — the Old Kingdom**  
**Egypt — the Middle Kingdom**  
**Egypt — the New Kingdom**

### 4.11.1 Activities

**CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING**

1. Why were foreigners able to invade Egypt’s Nile Delta during the First Intermediate period?
2. During which times was Egypt strongest and weakest?
3. List the lands that Egypt controlled during its strongest period?

**USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE**

1. Analyse **SOURCE 1**.
   a. Describe the details in the source.
   b. Make a list of the things the Africans, probably Nubians, are carrying.
   c. Outline what **SOURCE 1** can probably tell us about Egypt’s trade with Nubia.
2. Study the models of soldiers in **SOURCE 2** and use it as your evidence for a brief written description of Egyptian Middle Kingdom infantry.

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**SOURCE 3** From an inscription in the temple of Pharaoh Rameses III at Thebes describing a victory over the “Peoples of the Sea”, in about 1188 BCE

Year 8 under the majesty of [Rameses III] . . . foreign countries made a conspiracy. No land could stand before their arms . . . they were coming forward toward Egypt . . . I have the river mouths prepared like a strong wall, with warships, galleys and coaster . . . The troops consisted of every picked man of Egypt. They were like lions . . . The chariotry consisted . . . of every good and capable chariot-warrior. Those who reached my frontier . . . were dragged in, enclosed on the beach, killed and made into heaps . . .

---

**4.11.2 Decline and fall**

Egypt became weaker after the time of Rameses II. Libyans and “Peoples of the Sea” invaded the Nile Delta. These invaders were defeated many times (see **SOURCE 3**), but gradually Egypt lost its unity and its empire. The priests came to control Upper Egypt, while Lower Egypt was ruled by princes. In the Late Dynastic Period the country fell under the control of Nubians. In about 663 BCE the Assyrians took most of Egypt into their empire. Bronze Age Egypt had no iron ore and could not match the Assyrians’ iron weapons. Later Egypt fell under the rule of the Persians, followed by the Greeks and then the Romans.

### 4.11.2 Activities

**CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING**

1. Name the groups who invaded Egypt after the time of the New Kingdom Pharaoh Rameses II.
2. Why was Egypt unable to match the military might of the Assyrians?

**SEQUENCING CHRONOLOGY**

3. Identify the groups that dominated Egypt during the Late Dynastic Period and afterwards and list them in chronological order.

**USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE**

4. Analyse the inscription of Rameses III in **SOURCE 3**.
   a. Describe its style.
   b. Suggest why it would be written in such a style.
   c. Imagine that you are a high ranking official in the time of Rameses III. In the style of **SOURCE 3**, write a message congratulating the Pharaoh on his victory.
4.11 Putting it All together

**Identifying Continuity and Change**
1. Explain how Egypt's lack of Iron Age materials could have contributed to its decline and eventual collapse.

**Analysing Cause and Effect**
2. Using all three sources as your evidence, examine and write a short explanation of the roles played by war and trade in Egypt's rise and decline. In your answer, you could describe Egypt’s changing relations with Nubia and explain why Egypt fought other peoples, how wars enriched Egypt during the New Kingdom and why Egypt eventually declined and collapsed.

4.12 Rameses II — Egypt’s greatest pharaoh?

4.12.1 Who was Rameses II?

You have already encountered several rulers of ancient Egypt. They include: Narmer, the first pharaoh of both Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt (see 4.5 Pharaoh rules!); Khufu, for whom the Great Pyramid was built (see 4.9 Pyramid builders); Hatshepsut, the most famous of Egypt’s queens (see 4.4 The people of Egypt); and Tutankhamen, who became famous because his tomb was discovered with its contents untouched (see 4.10 Tutankhamen, Akhenaten and Nefertiti). However, many historians have regarded Rameses II, who ruled Egypt between c. 1279 and 1212 BCE, as the greatest of all pharaohs.

Rameses II (sometimes spelled Ramses and Ramesses) was probably born about 1303 BCE. He was a son of King Seti I. Rameses was in his early twenties when he became Egypt’s ruler. He held that position for longer than any other pharaoh. Because of his military campaigns and building projects, including temples and cities, he became known as Rameses the Great.

**The warrior king**

In about 1278 BCE, Rameses’ navy defeated the sea pirates who had been attacking Egyptian trading ships in the Mediterranean Sea. Rameses commanded an army of possibly 100,000 men. He gained fame through many battles in which Egypt fought the Hittite Empire to its north (see 2.10 Civilisations and empires in North Africa, Western Asia and Europe) and the Nubians to its south. During these campaigns, Rameses’ forces repelled invasions, regained territories Egypt had lost under previous pharaohs and secured Egypt’s borders.

4.12.1 Activities

**Check Your Understanding**
1. Name three groups of enemies defeated under Rameses II.
2. Why did he come to be known as Rameses the Great?

**Using Historical Sources as Evidence**
3. Study SOURCE 1. Describe the impression of Rameses II that is conveyed by this colossal head and explain why he would have wanted to be portrayed this way.

**Source 1** The head of the colossal statue of Rameses II at the Temple of Luxor in central Egypt
4.12.2 Fighting the Hittites

Over 20 years, from about 1277 BCE, Rameses led a series of campaigns against the Hittite Empire. In the first campaign, Rameses defeated several Palestinian princes (see the map in 2.7 The New Stone Age) and captured Amurra, a vassal state of the Hittite Empire in Syria.

In the following year, Rameses led his armies to attack the Hittite-controlled city of Kadesh. His army had four divisions, with Rameses personally leading the Amun division. However, the waiting Hittite army ambushed another Egyptian division as it was crossing a river, causing the soldiers to flee. According to Egyptian records, in the ensuing battle, Rameses found himself isolated from his forces but, almost single-handed, he defeated an overwhelming Hittite force, killing vast numbers as he escaped (see Source 3). Although the Battle of Kadesh was a stalemate and the Hittites remained in Syria, Rameses declared the battle a great Egyptian victory.

In later campaigns, spread between the seventh and twenty-first years of his reign, Rameses captured Hittite territory. But neither side was able to win a decisive victory and, in about 1258 BCE, the conflict ended with a peace treaty.

Great ruler or great bragger?

Historians have a vast number of primary sources about Rameses' achievements because, more than any other pharaoh, he was a great builder of monuments that glorified his deeds. Enormous numbers of huge statues were constructed,

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**SOURCE 3** From a poem inscribed by order of Rameses II on the walls of five temples to commemorate his victory at Kadesh

In the midst of many peoples, all unknown,
Unnumbered as the sand.
Here I stand,
All alone;
There is no one at my side;
My warriors and chariots afeared [frightened],
Have deserted me . . .
. . . Two thousand and five hundred pairs of horses were around,
And I flew into the middle of their ring,
By my horse-hoofs they were dashed all in pieces to the ground . . .

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**SOURCE 2** This relief sculpture in Luxor shows Hittite soldiers being crushed under the wheels of Rameses II's chariot at the Battle of Kadesh.

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**SOURCE 4** Rameses II in a detail from sculptures and hieroglyphs on his temple at Abu Simbel

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**vassal state** a state whose ruler recognises another, more powerful ruler as his overlord

**stalemate** a situation in a contest or conflict in which neither side can defeat the other
portraying him as a handsome, smiling and powerful ruler. At his temple at Abu Simbel, each of the four statues of Rameses II carved out of the face of a cliff is almost 20 metres tall. Records of his exploits, including scenes of him crushing the Hittites, were engraved deeply on monuments and temples throughout Egypt. So great was his reputation that nine future pharaohs took his name.

4.12.2 Activities

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING
1. Who did Rameses II’s forces fight at the Battle of Kadesh?
2. Was the Battle of Kadesh really an Egyptian victory?
3. How did the conflict with the Hittites end in 1258 BCE?

SEQUENCING CHRONOLOGY
4. Place the main events of Rameses II’s life on a timeline.

4.12 PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE
1. Look at SOURCE 2 and read SOURCE 3.
   a. According to SOURCE 2, what happened to Hittite soldiers at the Battle of Kadesh?
   b. According to SOURCE 3, why were Rameses II’s soldiers not at his side, how many enemies did he face and how did he defeat them?
   c. Are SOURCE 2 and SOURCE 3 conflicting or supporting evidence?
   d. Are these sources reliable or unreliable? Give reasons for your answer.
   e. How might the soldiers who fought for Rameses II have felt about what was inscribed in SOURCE 3?
2. Using SOURCES 3 and 4, describe how Rameses II wished to be remembered.
3. What problems for historians are created by the fact that all four sources in this subtopic and most other primary sources about Rameses II were produced on his orders?

DETERMINING HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE
4. Using evidence from all sources in this subtopic evaluate the significance of Rameses II in a response of at least one page to the following question: Which is more likely — that Rameses II was significant as a great leader or as a great bragger?
5. Use the internet to find other images and inscriptions of Rameses II. Do they support the conclusion you drew in your answer to question 4 or lead you to question it?

4.13 Egypt’s heritage

4.13.1 The greatest legacies
The ancient Egyptian civilisation lasted for thousands of years. The Egyptians discovered how to make paper. They created a unique writing system, invented a calendar similar to the one used today and produced a system of mathematics that enabled them to make complicated calculations. Yet very little of ancient Egypt’s culture has been handed down. In modern Egypt, nearly all people follow the religions of Islam or Christianity rather than the ancient beliefs of the land, and there is no connection between the arts, society and systems of government of modern and ancient Egypt.

Egypt’s greatest legacies to modern times are its archaeological wonders, especially its pyramids, tombs and temples, which have amazed generations. In the past, many of Egypt’s archaeological treasures were taken to other lands, where they ended up in museums or private collections. There has been much debate about whether they should rightfully be returned to Egypt. Whatever happens in the future, we can be sure that people will continue to be fascinated by such artefacts, especially the many mummies that are displayed in museums throughout the world.
Ongoing discoveries

Egypt continues to yield up fascinating discoveries. In 1999 archaeologists discovered a tomb complex thought to contain thousands of mummies from the time when Egypt was ruled by Greeks and Romans. This was seen as proof that these conquerors adopted much of Egypt’s culture. In 2008 another group of archaeologists discovered the ruins of a city from the time of Egypt’s first New Stone Age farmers. Ancient Egypt has yet to reveal all its secrets.

A team of US archaeologists has discovered the ruins of a city dating back to the period of the first farmers 7000 years ago in Egypt’s Fayyum oasis, the supreme council of antiquities said.

‘An electro-magnetic survey revealed the existence in the Karanis region of a network of walls and roads similar to those constructed during the Greco-Roman period,’ the council’s chief, Zahi Hawwas, said.

The remnants of the city are ‘still buried beneath the sand and the details of this discovery will be revealed in due course,’ Mr Hawwas said.

‘The artefacts consist of the remains of walls and houses in terracotta or dressed limestone as well as a large quantity of pottery and the foundations of ovens and grain stores,’ he added.

The remains date back to the Neolithic period between 5200 and 4500 BCE.

The local director of antiquities, Ahmed Abdel Alim, said the site was just seven kilometres from Fayyum lake and would probably have lain at the water’s edge at the time it was inhabited.

4.13.1 Activities

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. How has Egypt’s culture changed since ancient times?
2. What are ancient Egypt’s greatest legacies?
4.13 PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

USING HISTORICAL SOURCES AS EVIDENCE

1. Why do mummies and coffins like those in SOURCES 2 and 4 continue to fascinate people?
2. On Katebet’s mummy, below the image of painted arms are, from top to bottom, a winged goddess, a scarab, an image of Anubis and a shabti figurine. Use the knowledge you have gained from this topic and your library to explain the significance of at least two of these.
3. How would the appearance of the Great Pyramid (as illustrated in SOURCE 1) have been different in ancient times from the way it appears today? (Hint: Refer back to 4.9 Pyramid builders.)

IDENTIFYING CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

4. Explain how the discoveries in Egypt’s Fayyum Oasis (see SOURCE 3) provide further evidence of continuity of ancient Egypt’s civilisation.

4.14 SkillBuilder: Analysing and corroborating sources

What are the main ancient Egyptian primary sources?

Ancient Egyptian primary sources include pyramids, tombs, temples, mummies, coffins, art and written records on stone and papyrus.

Go to your learnON course to access:
- An explanation of the skill (Tell me)
- A step-by-step process to develop the skill, with an example (Show me)
- An activity to allow you to practise the skill (Let me do it)
- Questions to test your application of the skill (Applying skills)

4.15 Review

This final subtopic provides a range of opportunities for you to review and respond through:

- i revising and checking your historical knowledge
- ii demonstrating your ability to apply historical concepts and skills.

Go to your learnON course to access:
- A key chronology of events relevant to the topic
- A summary of the key knowledge presented in the topic
- A ‘Big Questions’ activity
- A multiple choice topic test
- Short answer or extended writing responses