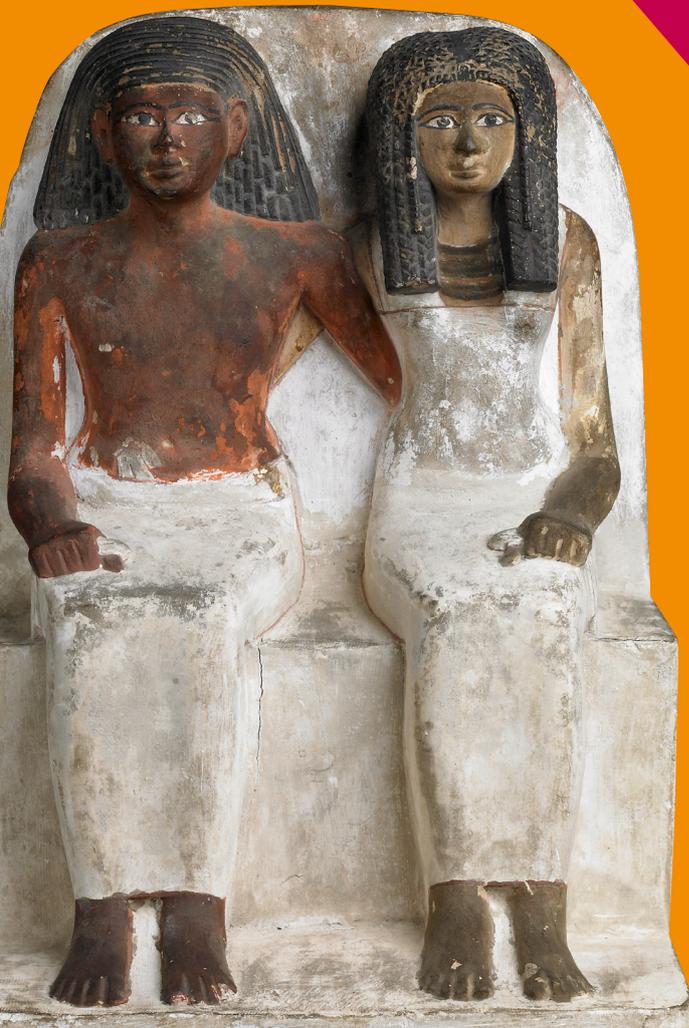


# THE BRITISH MUSEUM

## The wealth of Africa Ancient Egypt

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Teachers' notes



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## THE WEALTH OF AFRICA: USING THESE RESOURCES

This educational resource consists of 16 sets of resources on African civilisations, countries and themes.

Each set of resources includes:

- Teachers' notes
- Students' worksheets
- A presentation

Download the resources free at [www.britishmuseum.org/schools](http://www.britishmuseum.org/schools)

### Teachers' notes

These are intended to provide background material for teachers, but can also be referred to by students who want more contextual information.

### Students' worksheets

These are stand-alone worksheets which can be downloaded as classroom resources or viewed on the interactive whiteboard. They are self-contained, with tasks and questions and a limited number of sources in which the language has been slightly amended to make them more accessible to the likely reading ages of the students. They are also designed to be used independently of the teacher, e.g. for homework.

If teachers do not wish to spend more than one or two lessons on ancient Egypt, then the sheets will prove ideal for small project work, with groups of students taking one sheet, finding interesting and relevant information, and reporting back to the rest of the class. A specimen lesson plan along these lines is given below.

### Presentation

This provides a simpler and more visual introduction to the civilisation. It contains some of the images and sources found in the other sections, and can be shown on the whiteboard or used at home to give an overview of the main topics covered.

### Your feedback

Please help the British Museum improve its educational resources for schools and teachers by giving your feedback. The first 250 teachers or tutors to complete the online survey before 12.00 on 1 September 2011 will receive a printed set of illustrations of African civilisations by artist Tayo Fatunla. Visit [www.surveymonkey.com/s/wealthofafrica](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/wealthofafrica) to complete the survey and for terms and conditions.

## LESSON SCHEME: EGYPT IN AN HOUR

### Aim

To decide how advanced Egyptian civilisation was.

### Starter: Impressions of the ancient Egypt

Scroll quickly through the images in the presentation, and get feedback from students on their first impressions, especially on how advanced they consider the civilisation to have been. (10 minutes)

### Research

Divide the class into groups with one group per resource sheet. Each group has to look at the question at the top of the sheet, and decide on the answer by studying the sources. The group should note 5–10 relevant facts that it can feed back to the rest of the class as evidence of its answer. (20 minutes)

### Feedback

Each group feeds back its findings, opinion and evidence to the rest of the class, who could take notes. (15 minutes)

### Discussion

The central question of 'advanced' can be debated; i.e. which aspects reveal ancient Egypt to have been a developed civilisation; etc. (15 minutes)

### Homework

e.g. The ambassador for ancient Egypt defends his country – pick and explain five details that show how advanced Egypt was at this time, or look at the presentation or Young Explorers site, if not already done in class, or do further research into one of the topics to find more information.

## ANCIENT EGYPT c. 3000–30 BC: TEACHERS' NOTES

### Introduction

The civilisation of ancient Egypt was located in North Africa in largely the same area as modern-day Egypt. It flourished for more than 3,000 years and survived years of wars and political struggle until 30 BC, when the powerful Roman Empire conquered the region and made it a Roman province.

Ancient Egypt is generally studied under the heading of 'great Mediterranean civilisations' and it is often forgotten that it is equally a part of the history of Africa. Much of its trade, history, wars, politics and ethnicity are bound up with the continent, and it has every right to be considered African – a powerful counter argument to those who try to belittle the cultural and technological achievements of African civilisations.

Because Egypt was such a developed civilisation, and because its belief systems demanded the preservation of materials and knowledge, far more is known about it than many later societies. The fact that Egyptians had writing and used it to record a multitude of different aspects of their daily life, and the fact that much of this writing has been preserved and can be understood by modern scholars, means that ancient Egypt is one of the most accessible and comprehensible of ancient civilisations.

### Why study ancient Egypt?

So much has been written about ancient Egypt, and so much produced in the way of educational material, that some might question the need for yet another resource. The uniqueness of this resource is that it is based around objects in the British Museum's collection, and almost all (or ones very like them) are publicly accessible. This resource would be invaluable as an exercise in preparing for, or following up on, a visit to the British Museum.

Ancient Egypt is a popular part of the Key Stage 2 History syllabus in the English National Curriculum, and these resources have been tailored to meet the needs of this younger age group of students. There is a greater emphasis on object and pictorial material, and the main skill focus is on the interpretation of non-written evidence. The section will also be relevant to those following the Key Stage 3 syllabus who wish to discover more about an ancient African civilisation, or who wish to practise skills in interpreting object evidence.

In terms of the wealth of Africa, ancient Egypt is an example of a powerful trading nation with a sophisticated economy. In the popular imagination, ancient Egypt is almost synonymous with wealth and the production of extraordinary craftsmanship. Perhaps most remarkable is the length of time that Egyptian civilisation lasted as an economic and political force – few great powers last for hundreds, let alone thousands, of years.

### Geography

Not many civilisations have been quite so characterised and benefitted by their location as ancient Egypt. Its geographical position meant that it could link into, and prosper from, trade with the African hinterland, with Arabia and India through the Red Sea, and with the Mediterranean civilisations of Phoenicia, Greece and Rome.

Within the country, the great length and breadth of the River Nile and its annual flooding which fertilised the soil meant that a significant population could be sustained in the middle of otherwise inhospitable desert. The Nile also provided the main transport artery for the kingdom, helping to ensure the efficient functioning of the economy.

## History

In view of the huge time span of ancient Egypt, it would be inappropriate to provide more than a snapshot of its historical development. Historians tend to divide its history into broad headings: Pre- and Early Dynastic, and Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms, each interspersed with Intermediate Periods (see the timeline in the worksheets).

Upper and Lower Egypt were unified in the Early Dynastic period, and most of the large remaining pyramids date from the Old Kingdom. The first two intermediate periods saw the breakdown of royal authority. In the first, there was political fragmentation; and in the second, Egypt endured foreign domination by the Hyksos from the Middle East and Nubians from Kush.

## New Kingdom

The New Kingdom is the period when most of the best-known characters lived. In 1490 BC Egypt was ruled over by a female pharaoh, Hatshepsut. She expanded Egypt through trade. Her period of rule was known for its peace and prosperity and an increase in the construction of temples and monuments throughout the country. This in turn created a greater demand for more materials.

Around 1350 BC the pharaoh Amenhotep IV changed his name to Akhenaten and tried to replace worship of the god Amun with Aten, the sun disk. His son Tutankhamun restored the old religion, but he died young. The discovery of his tomb in 1922 gave him a greater significance than he had ever enjoyed in life.

Around 1279 BC, the pharaoh Ramesses II (The Great) began his reign of rebuilding and military conquest, but later pharaohs found this hard to sustain or defend, and Egypt fell victim to attack and foreign invasion, culminating in a line of Kushite pharaohs from 727 BC.

## Economy

There is disagreement among academics on how the ancient Egyptian economy worked. Given the numerous tomb paintings and records showing goods being brought to the pharaoh, it has been assumed by some that the economy worked along redistributive lines, i.e. that surplus goods, especially foodstuffs, were brought to the pharaoh or to local temples, who redistributed them to those in non-agricultural occupations according to their rank. Others point to evidence for markets from paintings and inscriptions as indicators of normal business activity and a market economy. Markets seem to have been situated next to temples, and connected to them in some way. Some believe that the redistribution aspect was no more than a tax on goods paid by workers, with only the elite – pharaoh, nobles and priests – benefitting from it. Underneath this level, a normal market economy operated.

Pharaohs conducted a regular survey of Egypt's wealth, presumably for taxation purposes, in which just about everything – even people – was valued. Provincial governors – *nomarchs* – were responsible for collecting these taxes. The major taxes levied on farmers were paid in cattle and grain.

The New Kingdom heralded a new period of prosperity for Egypt, which benefitted from the exploitation of Kush (Nubia) to the south. Initially, wealth was gained from plundering nearby states, but later pharaohs were content merely to accept annual tribute from these conquered regions. Egypt became particularly wealthy from trade with Asia (copper, lead, silver, semi-precious stones such as lapis lazuli and turquoise, horses and chariots, incense, oil, resins, sweet-smelling herbs), and Africa (ebony, ivory, gum resins, ostrich feathers, leopard skins, monkeys and giraffes, gold rings, nuggets and bars). The trade with the Mediterranean also remained important with silver imports from Mycenae (Greece) and wine among others.

## Money

Only towards the end of the Egyptian period, during the period of Greek influence, was coinage introduced, but it may have been used only by the elite or merchants paying tax, or to pay mercenaries. The fact that it was often found in hoards suggests that its value was in its bullion worth rather than as a means of buying goods. Not until the 4th century BC does the existence of small coins suggest that money was in widespread circulation as a means of exchange.

Previously, a barter system operated. Cloth which could be woven at home was apparently a significant medium of exchange, as was the food which farmers grew and products made by craftsmen in workshops.

For purposes of trade a common unit of exchange was used – the deben (c. 91g of copper) which could be subdivided into 10 kite. In a barter transaction each item that was offered by either side was first valued in deben, and then goods to the agreed value were exchanged by each side. A deben did not change hands; it did not even have to be present.

Wages were paid in bread and beer, and standard measurements were used for units of these based on the amount of grain used to make them. The standard basic wage was ten loaves of bread plus one-third to two full jugs of beer per day. This was the lowest salary. Other workers were paid in multiples of this standard wage, varying from twice as much to fifty times the standard wage for top earners. For highly paid workers it is unlikely that they were actually given the loaves and beer. They were probably allowed an account against which they could buy other things.

Work for the state was done through a system of conscription in which adults took part. Work was done for a short period each year. Workers would be paid, and possibly well paid.

## Agriculture

Agriculture was a contributing factor to Egypt's wealth and an important part of life. Most of the population was directly involved in farming. Many of the nobility were landowners, as were the pharaoh and priests, and most farmers worked on their land and paid taxes in the form of produce. The fertile land on the banks of the River Nile enabled Egyptians to grow wheat, beans, chickpeas, onions, cucumbers, garlic, leeks, and many spices. By far the most important crop was barley, which was used to make bread and beer. In addition they raised ducks and geese, sheep, goats and cows, and relied on an abundant supply of fish from the Nile.

## Society

Social life in ancient Egypt was dominated by the twin pillars of religion and the power of the pharaoh. Since the latter was regarded as a god himself, the two aspects were combined. Priests had a high status, as did scribes.

The gods played a vital part in the lives of Egyptians, and the strong belief in the afterlife reinforced the power of religion. Church and state were indissolubly linked in the position of the pharaoh, who held semi-divine status. On a lower level, priests acted as local administrators and recipients and distributors of taxes. The pantheon of gods was familiar to all classes, and their power over all aspects of daily life of ordinary Egyptians was absolute.

It was a rigidly hierarchical society, with little prospect for self-advancement, yet women and the poor had a considerable degree of equality under the law. The legal system was highly developed and cases were minutely recorded.

### Sources

All of the objects in the worksheets are part of the British Museum's collection. The paintings are from the tomb of Nebamun, an ancient Egyptian who lived in the city of Thebes around 1325 BC. Nebamun was a scribe in charge of grain collection for the city. The tomb would have been built before Nebamun died as a safe place for his mummified body and some of his belongings, all of which he believed he would need in the afterlife.

### REFERENCES

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### Answers

- 1 Wooden gaming pieces
- 2 Copper razor
- 3 Wax figure
- 4 Bronze sword
- 5 Wooden furniture
- 6 Reed pen box
- 7 Wooden comb
- 8 Linen mummy wrapping
- 9 Wooden toy
- 10 Wooden figure
- 11 Kohl jar
- 12 Bronze mirror
- 13 Headrest
- 14 Gold amulet
- 15 Limestone relief
- 16 Pottery jug
- 17 Linen cloth
- 18 Painting

## Your feedback

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## Find out more

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The British Museum's collection spans over two million years of human history and culture, all under one roof and includes world-famous objects such as the Rosetta Stone, the Parthenon sculptures, and Egyptian mummies.

The Museum's collection of over 200,000 African objects includes material from ancient to contemporary cultures. Highlights on display throughout the Museum include a magnificent brass head of a Yoruba ruler from Ife in Nigeria, vibrant textiles from across the continent, and the Throne of Weapons – a sculpture made out of guns.

## For students

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Students can experience and engage with the collection in many ways, from taking part in activity sessions at the Museum to using free online resources or playing interactive games in the classroom and at home.

## For teachers

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Search the Museum's collection online at [www.britishmuseum.org](http://www.britishmuseum.org) for information about objects, including pictures to download or print.

## Schools and teachers newsletter

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Sign up to the schools and teachers newsletter to receive regular updates on free special exhibitions previews, teacher events and new free resources at [www.britishmuseum.org/schools](http://www.britishmuseum.org/schools)

## Ancient Civilizations websites

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These award-winning British Museum websites have been specially designed for students in Years 5 and 6. Each site is supported by information and guidance for teachers. [www.ancientcivilizations.co.uk](http://www.ancientcivilizations.co.uk)

## The CarAf Centre

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These resources have been produced by the British Museum in collaboration with The CarAf Centre, a community educational support centre and registered charity based in the London Borough of Camden. For more information, visit [www.thecarafcentre.org.uk](http://www.thecarafcentre.org.uk)

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