

## History

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What was life like for the Ancient Egyptians?

<https://www.curriculumvisions.com/indexHistory.html>

There are many books about the Egyptians in **Curriculum Visions** so you can build on your existing knowledge but this book has video clips too.



Make your own museum about the life of Ancient Egyptians.

- Artefacts
- drawings with labels
- information
- posters
- models
- masks
- pyramids

Write a diary entry about your day as an Egyptian.

Would you liked to have been a Pharaoh or an everyday Egyptian? How would their lives have been different do you think?

These are pages take from on line but can be read from the screen and do not need to be printed.

## Who were the ancient Egyptians?

The ancient Egyptians were one of the world's great civilisations.

The ancient Egyptians were one of the world's first great **CIVILISATIONS**, whose skills in crafts were equal to anything we can do today (picture ①).

The ancient Egyptian civilisation lasted longer than the whole of the Christian era. Yet they lived in one of the places which you might think was the least promising – they lived in the desert of North East Africa.

▼ ① The ancient Egyptians told us much about themselves through carvings on temples, such as this one at Philae, near modern Aswan.

What brought them all together in such a remarkable way was one of the world's great rivers – the Nile – which runs like an arrow through the heart of the desert. It gave food, water and a means of getting about. It was the lifeblood of the ancient Egyptian empire. But it was also seen as a prize by people living nearby, and because of this the Egyptians became battle hardened warriors.

Egypt is a desert land where the Sun always shines and the night sky is filled with twinkling lights.

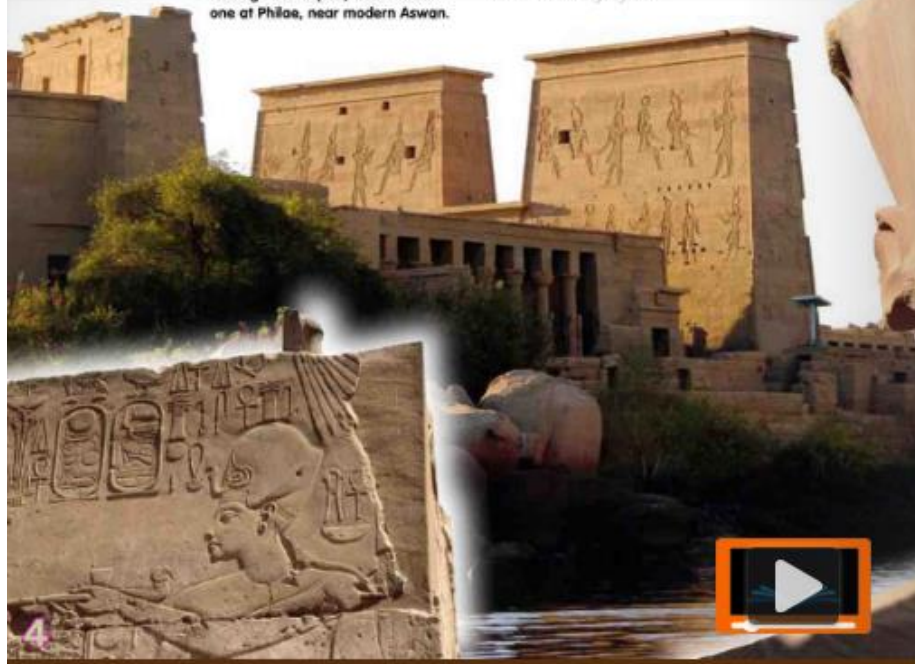
◀ ② You are looking straight into the eyes of PHARAOH Tutankhamun of ancient Egypt. This head was carved about 3,000 years ago in a region known as Upper Egypt. It is not a true likeness, but carved in a particular style that ancient Egyptians thought pleasing.

The Egyptians believed the sky and their land were connected, the heavens being the home of the gods and where people might go when they died.

Because their only source of water was the River Nile, this, together with the Sun and the night sky, controlled everything they did (picture ③).

The ancient Egyptians produced spectacular temples and **PYRAMIDS** of amazing size. But now their civilisation has vanished. So how do we know about them? Finding out about these people, from what they have left behind, makes the story of this book (picture ②).

▼ ③ The pyramid of Khafre at Giza seen silhouetted against the Sun. The pyramids were built in worship of the Sun god (see page 28).



# What is famous about the ancient Egyptians?

Ancient Egypt is famous for pyramids, mummies and the fabulous riches of king Tutankhamun.

Here are some things that you may think the ancient Egyptians are famous for, and some of the questions about ancient Egypt that they raise.



▲ We have all seen pictures of the Sphinx, but what is it and who was it built for?



▲ One of the most famous objects made by the ancient Egyptians is the golden mask of Tutankhamun. But why was it made, and who was Tutankhamun?



▲ Ancient Egyptians are famous for their picture writing (HEROGLYPHS). These hieroglyphs stand for Tutankhamun. How do we know?

► Most people have heard of mummies, but what were they, and is this one?

Famous things like **MUMMIES**, pyramids and the riches of Tutankhamun are all part of ancient Egypt, but from them alone you cannot get a very true picture of ancient Egyptian times. The purpose of this book is to set these things into a history of what happened and to explain why the ancient Egyptians lived and believed the way they did. It is a fascinating story.



◀► More than anything else we probably know the ancient Egyptians from the pyramids. But what were they for?

# Where was ancient Egypt?

If we make a map of all of the places where ancient Egyptian remains can be found, we see an extraordinarily long land, shaped like a flower on a long stalk.

The ancient Egyptians were united because they all lived along – and depended on – the River Nile.

The River Nile made it possible for people in ancient Egypt to grow food in the desert, and to transport food, people and building materials long distances. Without the river only a very few people could have lived in Egypt.

The yearly ebb and flow of the river's waters also set the pace of life for the ancient Egyptians.

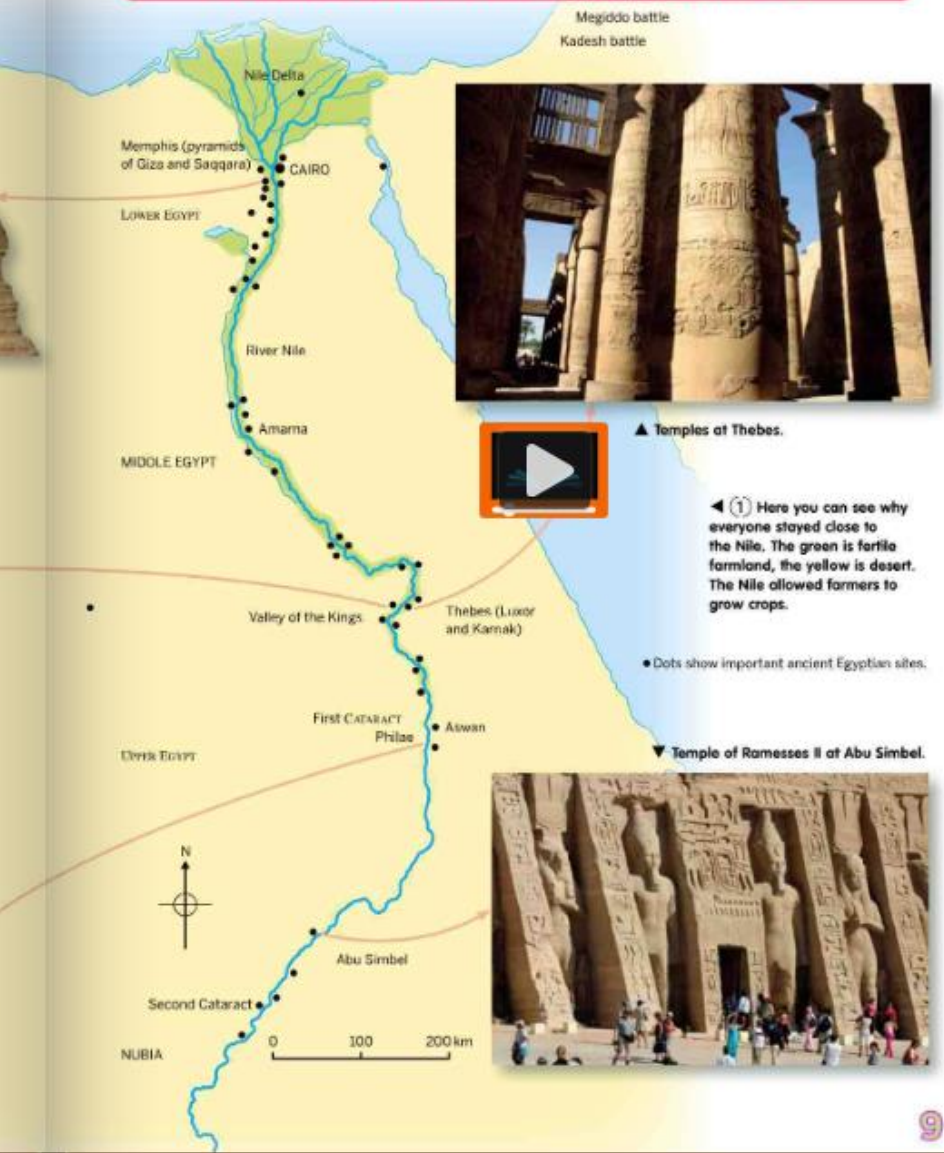
How do you know that nearly all the ancient Egyptians lived close to the river? **ARCHAEOLOGISTS** have plotted the remains of ancient Egypt on a map (picture ①). On these pages you can also see some of the best known of these remains.

► Temple of Philae, near modern Aswan.



▲ The pyramid of Khafre and the Sphinx, Giza.

▼ Valley of the Kings (where Tutankhamun was buried), Luxor.



▲ Temples at Thebes.

① Here you can see why everyone stayed close to the Nile. The green is fertile farmland, the yellow is desert. The Nile allowed farmers to grow crops.

• Dots show important ancient Egyptian sites.

▼ Temple of Ramesses II at Abu Simbel.



# How long did the ancient Egyptian kingdom last?



The ancient Egyptian kingdom lasted for more than 3,000 years and included about 30 dynasties of kings.



The ancient Egyptian civilisation can be traced back to 5000 BC. However, they first began to keep records from about 3000 BC and it is from this time that we get to know about kings, their names and what they did.

① Ancient Egyptian times.

2800 BC  
First capital at Memphis (near modern Cairo). First ever pyramid – the Step Pyramid.



This long period of recorded time is divided up into three main periods (picture ①): the Old Kingdom (the days of the PYRAMIDS), the Middle Kingdom and the New Kingdom (the days of king Tutankhamun).

2500 BC  
The Great Pyramids are built on a desert tableland overlooking the Nile Delta.

5000 BC  
The earliest traces of the ancient Egyptian civilisation.

3000 BC  
Earliest known Egyptian letter writing (hieroglyphics). First kings of Egypt.



Earliest Egypt

1st to 2nd dynasties

2650–1975 BC  
Old Kingdom

1975–1539 BC  
Middle Kingdom

1539–1075 BC  
New Kingdom

1075–332 BC  
Late Period  
Egypt conquered several times but remains an independent country.

Each of these periods are themselves divided into times ruled by related kings, known as **DYNASTIES** (just as English history is divided into periods named after families of kings, such as the Tudors).

Kings became known as **PHARAOHS**, and this is the term we shall use, although it was not the official title they used themselves.

When a king's line was lost because he had no heirs, a new dynasty started.

After the New Kingdom, Egypt had no more strong rulers and it was conquered several times. In 332 BC it was conquered by the Greeks and it later became a part of the Roman empire.



Time of temple building at Thebes (Luxor and Karnak).



Abu Simbel



Tutankhamun's tomb



332 BC–375 AD  
Greek and Roman period. Egypt conquered by Alexander the Great. Alexander's general Ptolemy becomes pharaoh. Rosetta Stone carved. Cleopatra rules Egypt. Egypt becomes a province of the Roman empire and stops being an independent country.

## Egypt, land of the Nile

The Nile was vital to the ancient Egyptians, just as it is to Egyptians today. So we can use modern pictures to help us imagine what the land of ancient Egypt was like.

▼ ① This ancient Egyptian tomb picture shows a farmer with a whip encouraging his oxen to plough the soil.



For most of its length the Nile valley is just a narrow strip of land a few kilometres wide. Only in the north does the land open out into the fan shape of the Nile **DELTA** and thus provide extra land for farming (see map on page 9).

### Farmers ancient and modern

How do we know how people used the Nile and its lands in ancient times? Fortunately, ancient Egyptian people drew their world on the walls and roofs of their tombs.

In picture ① you can clearly see a farmer working the land, the tools he used, the animals he reared and some of the crops he harvested.



▲ ② Boats were a vital part of life on Earth and life in the heavens, as shown by this tomb painting. It shows many people being taken by boat into the afterlife, accompanied by the god Horus (the falcon) and the god Osiris (the bird with a plumed crown).



◀ ③ A grove of date palm trees with clusters of brown dates hanging from them.

▼ ④ A farmer walking behind his plough with his son sowing seed just as he might have done 4,000 years ago.



◀ ⑤ This modern picture shows the area of farmland beside the Nile. The boat is a **felucca**, invented after the time of the ancient Egyptians who mostly used boats with oars as they had no shortage of slaves. There is fertile farmland beside the river, but the mountainous desert behind makes it impossible for farmers to spread out far from the Nile.



Much of this traditional life can still be seen today (pictures ③ and ④).

### Boats on the Nile

The Nile was, and still is, important as a way of getting about. We see this in modern Egypt and we can see it in the paintings of the ancient world, too (pictures ② and ⑤).

The Nile provided a link between all of the places of the ancient kingdom (see the map on page 9).

## Kingly objects from the past

Because the ancient Egyptians lived a long time ago, most of what they made and used has perished. But what remains gives important clues to what life was like.

There is a desert valley near Luxor in **UPPER EGYPT** where the pharaohs of the New Kingdom were buried. It is called the Valley of the Kings. Here, below a cliff that looks like a natural pyramid, many caves were dug and turned into tombs.

This is where we find the richest source of objects from the time of the ancient Egyptians. Let's look at some of these objects and see what we make of them, and what they can tell us.

### The tomb of Tutankhamun

The tomb of the boy pharaoh Tutankhamun is small. For thousands of years it remained undisturbed while the bigger tombs around were ransacked by grave robbers. It was sealed in 1325 BC and from then until 1922, some 3,200 years, no living soul entered the sealed chamber, no light reached it and no dust settled on the objects inside.

This is why, when the archaeologist Howard Carter opened the tomb, he found 32,000 untouched objects inside (picture ①).



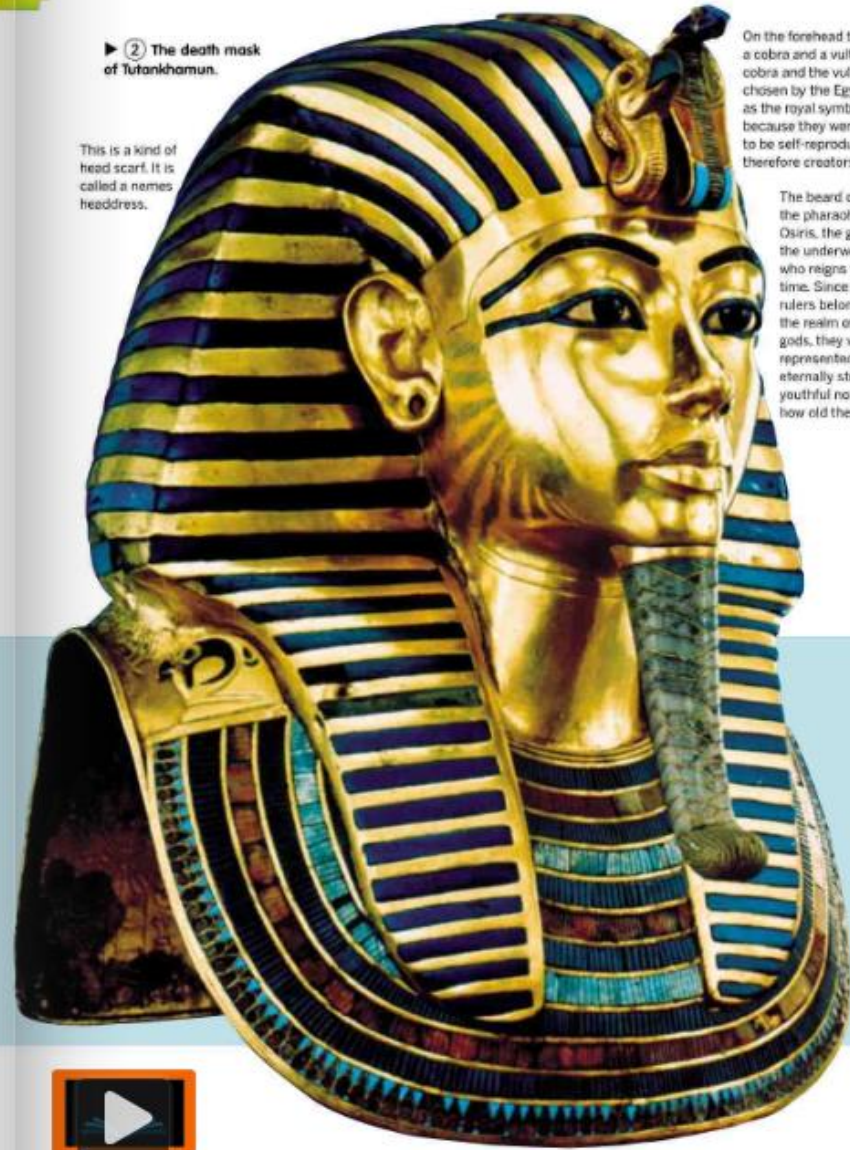
▲ ① This is a photograph taken in 1922 showing one of the rooms packed high with grave goods. They are things the priests believed the pharaoh would need in the afterlife. The largest object you can see is one side of a bed with supports carved in the shape of a leopard.

### Death mask

We know this is a death mask of the pharaoh because it was found on his **MUMMIFIED** body (picture ②). It is made of 11 kg of gold set with semi-precious stones. It tells us that at this time ancient Egypt was a very rich country because it could spare so much gold. It is evidence that the people thought very highly of their pharaoh. It also shows us that the ancient Egyptians were fine craftspeople and that they were very artistic. It also gives clues to the way the pharaoh dressed.

▶ ② The death mask of Tutankhamun.

This is a kind of head scarf. It is called a nemes headdress.



On the forehead there is a cobra and a vulture. The cobra and the vulture were chosen by the Egyptians as the royal symbols because they were thought to be self-reproducing and therefore creators, or gods.

The beard connects the pharaoh to Osiris, the god of the underworld, who reigns for all time. Since Egyptian rulers belonged to the realm of the gods, they were represented as eternally strong and youthful no matter how old they were.





### Tutankhamun's throne

The golden throne (picture ③) has a picture of Tutankhamun and his wife on the back. They are shown with a Sun disc with sunbeams. This is a symbol of the Sun god (known as Re, Ra and Aten).

### The coffin

The body was buried in a stone coffin, or **SARCOPHAGUS**, and in this were three coffins. The innermost coffin was made from 110 kg of gold (picture ④). Like the death mask, it has strips of the rare and beautiful blue stone lapis lazuli set into the gold.

### What we can tell from these objects

If we had found no other objects or writings about pharaohs, beyond those you can see here, what could we tell from just this one tomb?

We would know that it was a highly skilled civilisation, that it was wealthy, and that its people thought that it was important to preserve the body after the king died.

We can imagine that the people thought that the pharaoh was some kind of link to the gods that the people believed in.



▶ ③ The throne of Tutankhamun shows the pharaoh and his wife. The Sun god Re stretches out rays of light to the pharaoh. The arms of the throne are made in the shape of lions, protectors of the pharaoh.



◀ ④ This is the inner gold coffin found in Tutankhamun's tomb.

## The lives of ordinary people

The homes of ordinary people have rarely survived because they were usually made of mud. But near the Valley of the Kings they were made of stone.

There is a unique valley near to the Valley of the Kings at Thebes (modern Luxor). It is the village in which the people who made the royal burial chambers lived.

▼ ① This is the village of the workers (Deir el-Medina). This must have been a busy place, with wives cooking food and cleaning clothes while husbands worked at making the royal tombs.



Picture ① shows a main street with dozens of small stone-built houses on either side. Each house had several rooms.

The upper parts of the houses have disappeared, probably because they were made from mud bricks and so have worn away. The houses may also have had roofs of palm-fronds supported on wooden beams laid across the walls.



## Clues to the simple life

A few objects remain that tell us what ordinary people did. Picture ②, for example, shows a woman grinding corn. This small stone object was made at the same time as the Great Pyramids were being built. She has a headdress (called a nemes headdress) of the same kind as the pharaoh. So we can conclude that this was a traditional style of dress for everyone, not just pharaohs, although we can imagine that the materials used to make the pharaoh's headdress would be finer than for ordinary people.

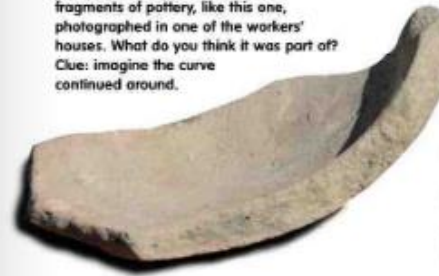
We can also see just how people ground corn, using a rod-shaped stone rubbed on a flat stone. It is called a quern. Looking at this carving allows us to imagine that this was both hard work and hard on the knees.

Pieces of ordinary pottery give us more clues to the ancient Egyptian way of life. For example, picture ④ is a hollowed stone used to make flour. You may care to try to work out what picture ③ is part of. It is made of a simple clay pottery.

▼ ② A statue of a woman grinding corn.



▼ ③ Archaeologists often find just fragments of pottery, like this one, photographed in one of the workers' houses. What do you think it was part of? Clue: imagine the curve continued around.



◀ ④ These objects were found in one of the workers' houses. The one on the left was used for grinding corn. Grain was put in the bowl and a long pole dropped into the bowl time after time until the grain turned into flour. The other object is part of a trough.



## Stories in words – hieroglyphics

Ancient Egyptians also left writing as a record of their lives.

There are many ways to write words. We are used to using the letters of our alphabet. But there are other ways of writing, too. The ancient Egyptians used little pictures based on animals, humans, gods and the tools they used in their work. We call these pictures **HIEROGLYPHS** (a word which comes from the Greek meaning sacred carvings, because they were usually carved in stone) (pictures ① and ②).

### Word pictures

Each hieroglyph represents a sound, a letter of the alphabet or even a whole word. Hundreds of pictures are needed for this kind of writing.

The Egyptians used hieroglyphic writing for nearly 3,500 years, beginning in about 3300 BC and lasting into Roman times.

① Part of a wall containing hieroglyphs.



### The Rosetta Stone

It is doubtful if we would know what any of the hieroglyphs meant if it weren't for a famous 2 m high tombstone called the Rosetta Stone.



























The Rosetta Stone is a tablet written in three different ancient languages: Egyptian (hieroglyphics), Arabic and Greek. This tablet was used to work out the meaning of the hieroglyphs.

▼ The Rosetta Stone – part of a tombstone (stela) from ancient Egypt.



### How do you read hieroglyphics?

When we read English, we read from left to right in a straight line. Hieroglyphs were often written in rows or columns and can be read from left to right, right to left, or top to bottom. Sometimes the symbols are placed to make a nice pattern (as in cartouches, pages 24–25).

A 	B 	C 
D 	E 	F 
G 	H 	I 
J 	K 	L 
M 	N 	O 
P 	Q 	R 
S 	T 	U 
V 	W 	X 
Y 	Z 	▲ ② Each symbol above is a hieroglyph. Together they make the written language of hieroglyphics.

## CLUES TO THE PAST

The way to read hieroglyphics (the writing that uses hieroglyphs) is to look at the animals or humans. These always face the direction the line should be read from. For instance, if all the animals are facing right, it should be read from right to left. If all the animals are facing left, it should be read from left to right.

Legal documents were written in rows. Columns were also used on doorways, tomb walls and monuments.

### Royal names and cartouches

Like every Egyptian, a future pharaoh was given a name at birth. But on his coronation he was given a royal name as well.

▼ ③ Here are the cartouches of some of the important pharaohs. Note that the symbols can be arranged in any order, as shown by the pictures on this page. Each cartouche is the royal name, except for Horemheb and Ramesses, where both birth and royal names are shown.



Khufu



Khafre



Akhenaten



Tutankhamun



Horemheb

## CLUES TO THE PAST



Menkaure



Hatshepsut



Thutmose III



Seti I



Ramesses II

Sometimes groups of hieroglyphs were placed inside an oval ring with a straight line on one side. This is known as a **CARTOUCHE** (picture ③).

Using a cartouche meant that the name inside was that of a pharaoh. The ancient Egyptians believed that the cartouche protected the royal name.

### The end of hieroglyphics

Because hieroglyphics were so complicated, few people could read them. Over the centuries, ordinary people, and even priests, began to use simpler forms of writing using alphabets. As a result, the hieroglyphic system finally died out.