

Change and continuity in Ancient Egypt



Additional material

Our lesson slides contain visual elements, such as historical images or timelines, associated with rich explanations. This document provides the verbal explanation that accompanies these visual elements - otherwise known as a narrative. The narrative and slides are matched via this icon:

What continued to stay the same across 3000 years?



The idea of **continuity** is that over a long period of time, some things will remain the same, for example, a language that is spoken, a belief that is held or a method that is used. The Ancient Egyptian civilisation lasted for around 3000 years and across its existence there was much **continuity** as well as change.

The heart of Ancient Egypt was the great River Nile that runs through all of Egypt, meeting the Mediterranean Sea in the north. Thanks to the annual floods, the land surrounding the river was very fertile and ideal for growing crops. Throughout the Ancient Egyptian civilisation, the River Nile continued to be hugely important. It allowed the Ancient Egyptians to have farmland to grow food and to make an income by selling crops.

Across the 3000 years of the Ancient Egyptian civilization, there was always a ruler called a pharaoh. There were at least 170 pharaohs, of which only seven were female and the rest were male. The youngest ever pharaoh to rule was Tutankhamun. Although who the pharaoh was changed across the 3000 years, Ancient Egyptians continued to believe that pharaohs were the human form of their gods and goddesses.

Throughout the 3000 year civilisation, religion continued to be one of the most important parts of life in Ancient Egypt. People spent their lives trying to please their gods. They did this because they believed that if they pleased the gods then the god Anubis would lead their soul (called ba in Ancient Egyptian) to the afterlife when they died. Throughout the civilisation, this religious belief continued to be one of the most important for the Ancient Egyptians.

Much of what we know about Ancient Egypt is based on hieroglyphs, a writing system which used pictures and symbols to represent words and sounds. People called scribes would spend years learning how to read and write hieroglyphs as some of the pictures



and symbols were very detailed! Across the whole Ancient Egyptian civilisation, scribes continued to use detailed hieroglyphs for important religious messages. Hieroglyphic writing has been found in places like the tombs of pharaohs which is evidence of this.

What changed across 3000 years?



Although many things continued to stay the same for 3000 years, other aspects of life changed in Ancient Egypt. The earliest Ancient Egyptians, in the Old Kingdom, were known for being pyramid builders as they built the Great Pyramid and Great Sphinx monument at Giza. The pyramids were built as tombs for the pharaohs when they died and were so big and impressive to show how important the pharaohs were. By the time of the Middle Kingdom, things had changed as the Ancient Egyptians now built the pharaohs' tombs in the Valley of the Kings.

Throughout the Ancient Egyptian civilisation, preserving the bodies of their dead was seen as important. This was because they believed that each night, ba would return from the afterlife to its human body and so the body needed to be kept in good condition. As time passed throughout the civilisation, the Ancient Egyptians' changed the mummification methods they used to preserve bodies. The earliest Ancient Egyptians, in the Old Kingdom, tried wrapping the bodies in linen cloths and drying them out with hot desert sand. However, this did not always work and so later Ancient Egyptians used embalming and the removal of internal organs to mummify the body.

Although hieroglyphs were used continuously across the 3000 years, the Ancient Egyptian writing system also changed. The scribes began to use less detailed symbols and pictures, which made it much easier and quicker for the scribes. The original detailed hieroglyphs were kept for use in the most important texts like religious messages, while everyday information changed to the less complex versions developed by the scribes.

