

Hands On Learning

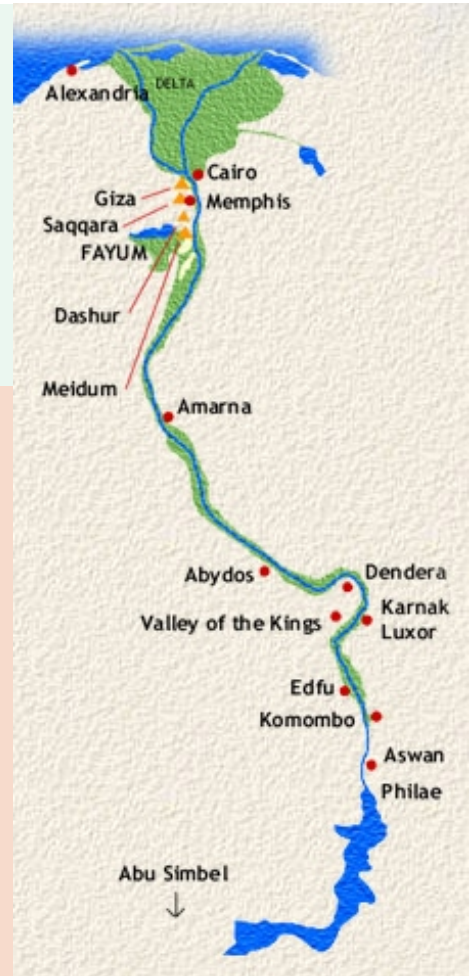
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ANCIENT EGYPTIAN INDUSTRIES

AH 39

This box contains objects relating to Egyptian industries. Whilst agriculture was the most vital industry, the importance of other trades and crafts are reflected in the many buildings and artefacts left behind by the ancient Egyptians.

This map shows the main regions and cities, some of which are mentioned in these information sheets.



Stone sickle blades

The two pieces of flat stone with sharpened edges in this box are actually sickle blades. Several of these blades would have been fixed into a curved wooden handle, rather like teeth in a jawbone. Sometimes a cow's jawbone may actually have been used as a handle. Sickles were used to cut down stalks of corn at harvest time. Groups of men would have walked along cutting the corn and others would follow them, picking up the stalks that had been dropped. In the picture below you can see this activity being carried out.



Wheat



The small seeds in the little Perspex box are grains of a species of wheat called Emmer. Wheat was an important crop in ancient Egypt. It is often found in ancient Egyptian tombs where it was placed as an offering to the dead, as the Egyptians believed that the dead still needed food in the afterlife.

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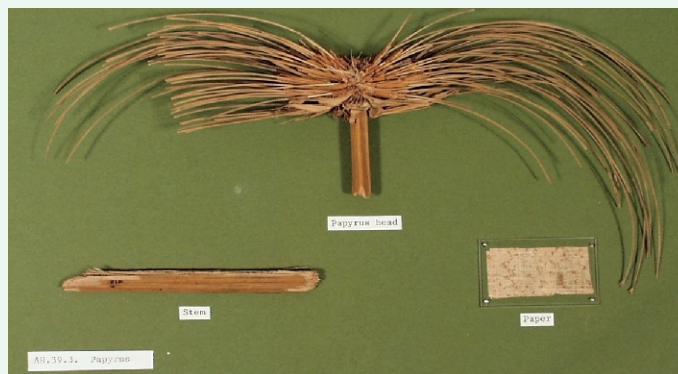
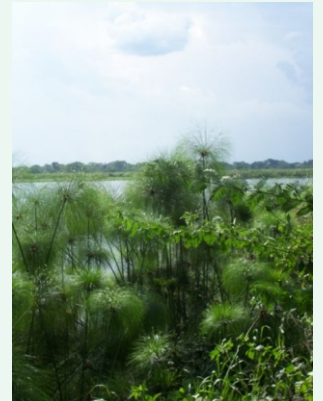
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Papyrus

In this box you will also find examples of another important crop for the Egyptians, papyrus. Papyrus is a reed that grows along the banks of the river Nile (see the picture on the right). It was used for many different things such as making furniture, baskets, mats, boxes, sandals, tools, rope and boats. Furthermore, the papyrus root was a source of food, medicine and perfume. The Egyptians also discovered that it could be prepared to make a form of paper. In fact, the English word 'paper' comes from the word papyrus. The thick stem of the plant was cut into pieces, measuring about 30 cm long. The outer skin was peeled off and the pith was sliced into strips. The strips would then be laid vertically on a flat surface, slightly overlapping one another and pounded with a hammer until they had been flattened out. Another layer of strips would then be placed horizontally on top and then also flattened. The sticky sap of the papyrus held the layers together and after they had dried in the sun, they could



be lifted as a single sheet of paper. The surface could be smoothed if rubbed with a shell or a piece of ivory. When more than one sheet was required several single sheets could be pasted together to make a long roll. Papyrus reeds were also used to make reed pens and brushes.

Rope

The sample of rope in this box is likely to be made of twisted strands of papyrus. Rope made in this way would have been strong and hardwearing.



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Pot

The small pottery vase is an example of the potter's craft. Egyptian potters produced vast amounts of pottery containers to hold grain, water, wine, beer, flour and oils. Food was also cooked in clay pots. The banks of the Nile provided the mud and clay used to make these ceramics. This vase may have been made to hold perfume or oil. It was found at Memphis, at the head of the Nile Delta.



Tile fragment

This beautifully blue glazed tile fragment is decorated with a picture of a long legged animal. Tiles were commonly used in Egypt to decorate the walls and floors of palaces and temples, tombs and wealthy houses. Approximately 36,000 tiles were used to decorate two tomb areas in the Step Pyramid of Djoser at Saqqara. This tile is made of faience, which is a type of non-clay ceramic made from crushed quartz or sand, lime and ash. If you feel the broken edge you will notice the gritty texture. A glaze was added, which was usually coloured blue or green by adding ground copper. Faience was called *tjehnet* by the Egyptians, which means 'dazzling', 'shining' or 'gleaming'.



Textile fragment

Another important ancient Egyptian industry was textile production. Textiles were used as widely as they are today, for clothing, interior decoration and for making equipment. A wealth of textile remains have survived in Egypt, partly due to the dry, hot, climate and also as everyday textiles were frequently recycled into mummy bandages for the dead. This fragment of canvas weave is thought to date from third century AD and was found at Karanis in the Fayum area of Egypt.

