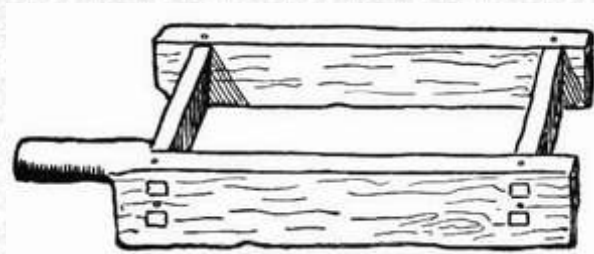


Chapter Three - The Egyptian Empire

A. The Conquering Pharaohs

The Hyksos reigned in Egypt about two hundred years (1800-1600 B.C.). Then the Egyptians rose and expelled them, and native Pharaohs sat on the throne again. But this was not enough. They seem to have been furiously determined to make sure against future invasion from any direction, and they acted on the principle that attack is the best defence. The boundaries of Egypt were pushed westwards to guard against invasion from Libya, southwards up the Nile as a protection against Nubia and Punt. The greatest danger, however, was from the princes and cities of Syria, who had probably helped the Hyksos. The Syrians were encouraged by the Hittites to resist. But the great conqueror, Thutmose III (1501-1447 B.C.), year after year led his armies into Syria and dealt crushing blows, till not only the left arm of the Fertile Crescent (p.61), but its top, too (the upper reaches of the Euphrates and Tigris), were entirely in his power. A strong navy on the coast of Syria supported his army, threatened the Hittites on the south coast of Asia Minor and compelled Crete and Cyprus to obey him. Thus arose in the Eighteenth Dynasty, the Egyptian Empire. Empire is the name we give to a large area of land inhabited by different races, and ruled over by a conquering race which keeps its power by a strong army and navy and by careful organisation. Thutmose was proud of his conquests, and had accounts of them written and engraved. He had four obelisks made (tall square pillars with pointed tops), and they have spread his renown further than he ever imagined, for one is now in Constantinople (Istanbul), one in Rome, one in London and one in New York.

The Egyptian Empire reached its highest glory under Amenhotep III (1411-1375 B.C.). Thebes, the capital of the Empire, was enriched with the spoils of many nations and adorned by architects and artists who could command the labour of huge slave-gangs, Syrians and Negroes, the conqueror's prisoners of war. Temples, palaces and monuments, lavishly adorned with gold and silver and painted with brilliant pictures, gleamed against a background of rich foliage. Numerous flags and bright-coloured awnings added to the gaiety of the scene, and the river was crowded with shipping of every kind.



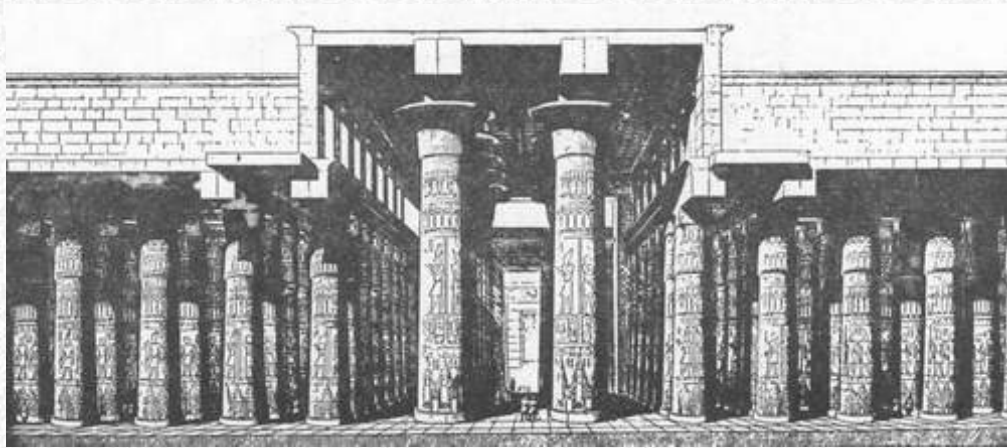
Egyptian Mould For Brick-Making

To this period and that of the following dynasty, the Nineteenth, belong the mighty temples which, even in their ruined state, greatly impress visitors to Karnak, the modern name for Thebes. The ancient temples erected by earlier kings had been neglected by the Hyksos, and the Empire Pharaohs rebuilt and extended them on a magnificent scale. At right angles to the river lay a whole series of buildings comprising the temple of Amen. The main features of this were a spacious open court surrounded by a colonnade and next to it a huge covered hall, the largest hall with pillars ever erected by men. The main pillars down the centre of the hall are sixty-nine feet high, and a hundred men can stand on the top of each.

The walls and pillars of the temple were carved and painted with the exploits of Thutmose III and other conquerors. A stately avenue of carved rams ran from the temple gates to the river. On the south side of the temple was a large artificial lake which reflected its glories. From this stretched a park a mile and a half long, with an avenue and statues down the centre connecting the temple of Karnak with another temple of Amen on the river bank at Luxor, the southern suburb of Thebes. This too had a large hall with towering pillars. These buildings could have been erected only by a nation whose architects, artists and craftsmen had reached a very high level of skill, which challenges comparison with those of any other period of history, including our own.

The next Amenhotep (1375-1360 B.C.), the fourth of the line, was a very different man from his father. The glory of the Empire, the worship of Amen, did not interest this young king at all. He devoted his life to suppressing the worship of Amen and all other gods, and encouraging the whole Empire to recognise Aton, the Sun-God, as the only God. Perhaps he thought this would be a better way to bind the Empire together than a chain of garrisons. Everywhere the temples of Amen were closed and his name erased from all monuments, even though this involved cutting out his father's name too and changing his own to Akenaton ("He in whom Aton is satisfied"). However he differed from his ancestors in other ways, Akenaton inherited their strong will, for he abandoned Thebes and all its glories and built himself a new capital two hundred miles lower down the river, Aketaton, now called Tel-el-Amarna. Though he failed to establish his new worship, which declined after his death, it marks him out as the greatest teacher of religion before Moses. For though his God is a sun-god, Akenaton has an

enlightened idea of him as Creator and Sustainer of all living things and Father of all men, whether Syrian, Negro or Egyptian. Here is one of his hymns to Aton:



The Great Hall Of Pillars In The Temple Of Amen At Thebes - Restoration of the hypostyle of the temple of Karnak.

(*) *"All cattle rest upon their pasturage,
The trees and the plants flourish,
The birds flutter in their marshes,
Their wings uplifted in adoration to thee.
All the sheep dance upon their feet,
All winged things fly,
They live when thou hast shone upon them."*

Note: [*] Based on "Cambridge Ancient History."



King Akenaton

Akenaton abandoned the stiff ceremonies of previous Pharaohs, who had to pose as demi-gods, and lived in public and in private as the father of a happy family. He influenced the artists and sculptors of his age to adopt a simpler, more natural and life-like style, depicting human beings and animals as they really were.

His successor and son-in-law, who was first known as Tutankaton, could not for long resist the pressure of those who believed in the old order of things. He returned to Thebes and changed his name to Tutank-amen. Twelve years ago his tomb was found in that valley in the cliffs across the Nile from Thebes, where the kings and queens of the Empire were buried.



Queen Nefertiti, Wife Of Akenaton

Although precautions were taken to protect from interference these burial galleries, cut out of rock, all of them but this have at some time or other been rifled by robbers. But Tutankamen's tomb had escaped these attentions, and a wonderful collection of jewels and furniture was taken out, showing the very high standard of workmanship at the end of the eighteenth dynasty. But artists and dreamers cannot rule an empire.



Ramses II Conquering His Northern Enemies

The recent changes in Egypt itself and the neglect of the Empire had encouraged Egypt's enemies and more distant subjects to stir up trouble. A line of mighty warrior-kings was needed. And round about 1300 B.C. such kings arose, in the nineteenth dynasty.

We may be quite sure that the Hittites took advantage of the forty years' weak rule in Egypt to push forward into northern Syria again and to encourage rebels and invaders in southern Syria and Palestine. The Hittites seized Kadesh, an important town on the river Orontes which had given Thutmose III more trouble than any other of his conquests. A long war between Egypt and the Hittites broke out, and a fierce battle took place outside Kadesh. The Egyptians were saved only by the personal bravery of the king, Ramses II, and his charioteer, who, on their own, charged the whole mass of Hittite chariots and drove them across the river into their own infantry, while the retreating Egyptian army rallied for very shame.

In 1272 B.C., the Egyptians and Hittites made a treaty, and after that they were on friendly terms. For they were both threatened by other enemies, especially from the north. For a long time now fierce, barbarous tribes had been pushing south through Greece and Asia Minor and driving out the tribes already settled there. These in turn had pushed their way into the Hittite empire, and were at first accepted as allies. Later, fresh hordes had poured down, till at last they swept the Hittite Empire away, Hattusas being sacked round about 1200 B.C. A few years after the storm descended on Egypt. A great horde of mixed nations came through Syria with a long train of ox-waggons, while a large fleet sailed down the coast. Ramses III met both sets of invaders, and, thanks chiefly to his archers, defeated them by land and sea. Carvings in Egyptian temples show these invaders as carrying large round shields and broad swords, and wearing a high head-dress of feathers and a short kilt.

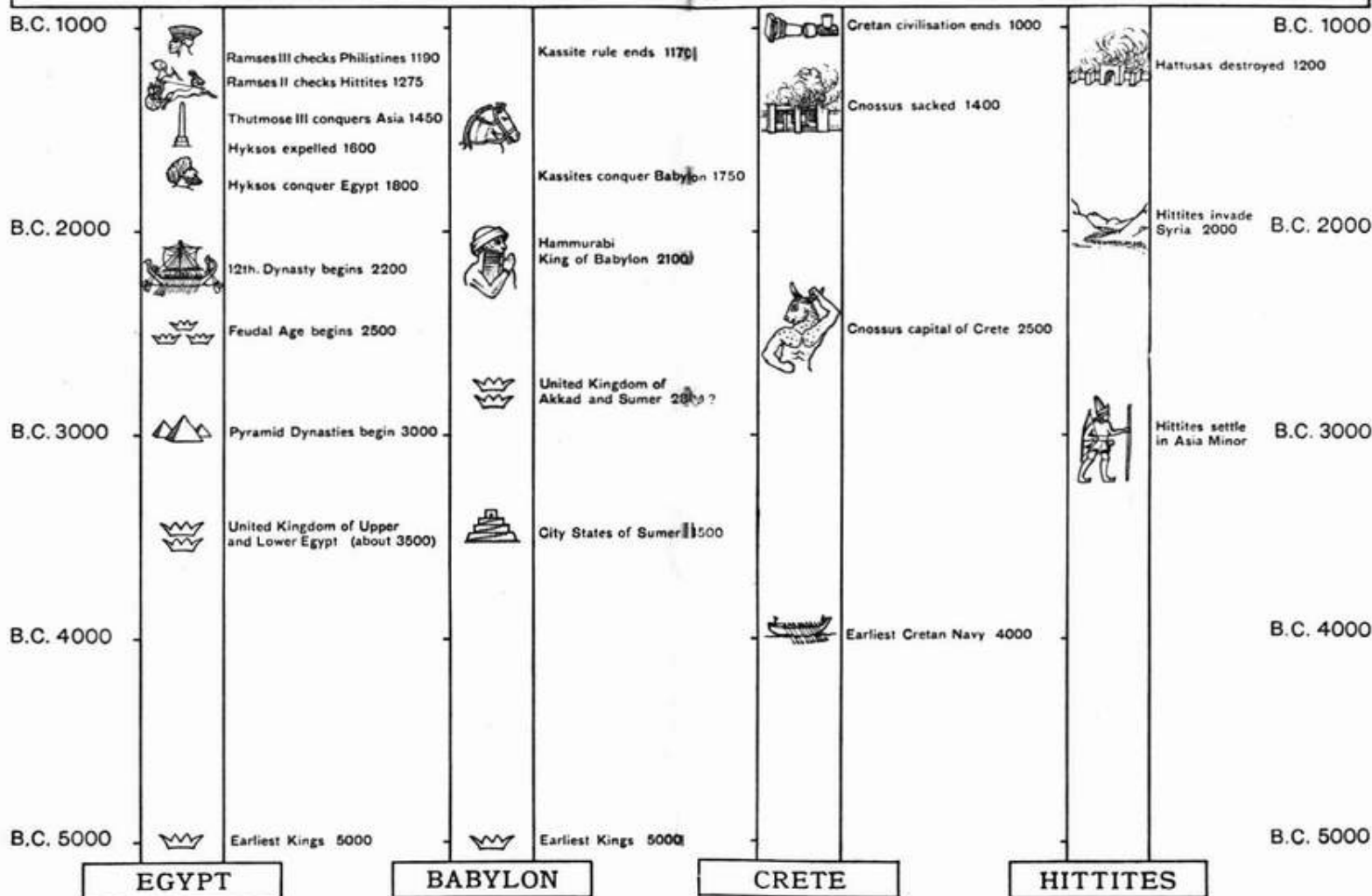
Greek records of a later date give a similar description of the tribes of south-western Asia Minor, and it is very probable that the chief invaders came from this district, though they probably brought with them Cretans and perhaps a few Achaeans (see p. 108), ancestors of the Greeks. The invaders settled in south-western Palestine, to which country they gave their name, as they were called Philistines. They were always regarded there as foreigners and intruders.



Terraces And Temple Of Queen Hatshepsut

The first important queen in History. Unlike most of the Egyptian monarchs of her period she disliked war, and worked for peace and prosperity. The temple is situated on the bank of the Nile opposite Thebes near the entrance to the Valley of the Kings.

TIME DIAGRAM FOR THE EARLIEST CIVILISATIONS



Time Diagram For The Earliest Civilisations

B. Life And Death In Ancient Egypt

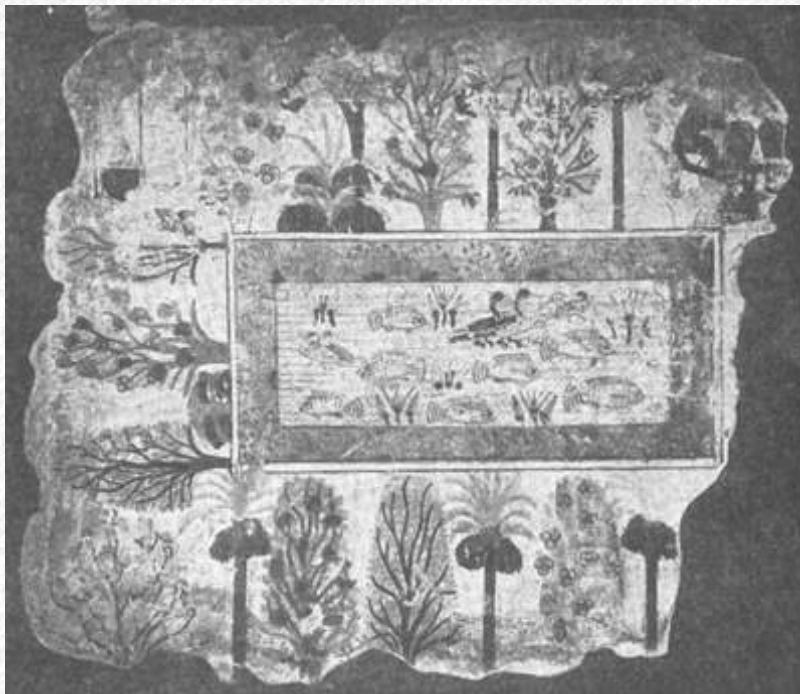
After this we shall have little more to say about the history of Egypt, although that long and interesting story is not yet ended to-day. But let us now find out something about the ancient Egyptian way of life. First of all, what did these Egyptians look like? They were a dark-skinned race of slim build and small features. The upper classes wore wigs with long elaborate curls. All men were clean-shaven, but men of high rank wore a false beard on state occasions, as a symbol of wisdom. Everybody put a blue or green ointment on the eyelids to avoid sore eyes, owing to the glare of the sun. The warm, dry climate made heavy woolen clothing unnecessary. Men of the lower classes wore a simple loin-cloth, while those who were richer wore a short, pleated kilt of fine white linen fastened by a handsome girdle. Usually this was all they wore, except for a deep collar, finely enameled, which is more correctly called a pectoral, because it lay mainly on the breast. Men of higher rank sometimes wore a short-sleeved white tunic. Women wore a long close-fitting frock of fine linen with shoulder straps or short sleeves, and a pectoral. On special occasions sandals were worn.

When they were not required at Court or in the army, Egyptian nobles lived on their country estates. Their villas were set in beautiful gardens surrounded by walls. There were ornamental ponds in which water-lilies and the lotus flourished. There were sure to be fruit trees and flowering shrubs. The house itself, in its general outward appearance, resembled the most modern type of house which is being built nowadays, for it was simple and cubic in design and was covered with a sort of rough, white plaster.



Girls With Baskets Of Wine And Meats And Live Ducks

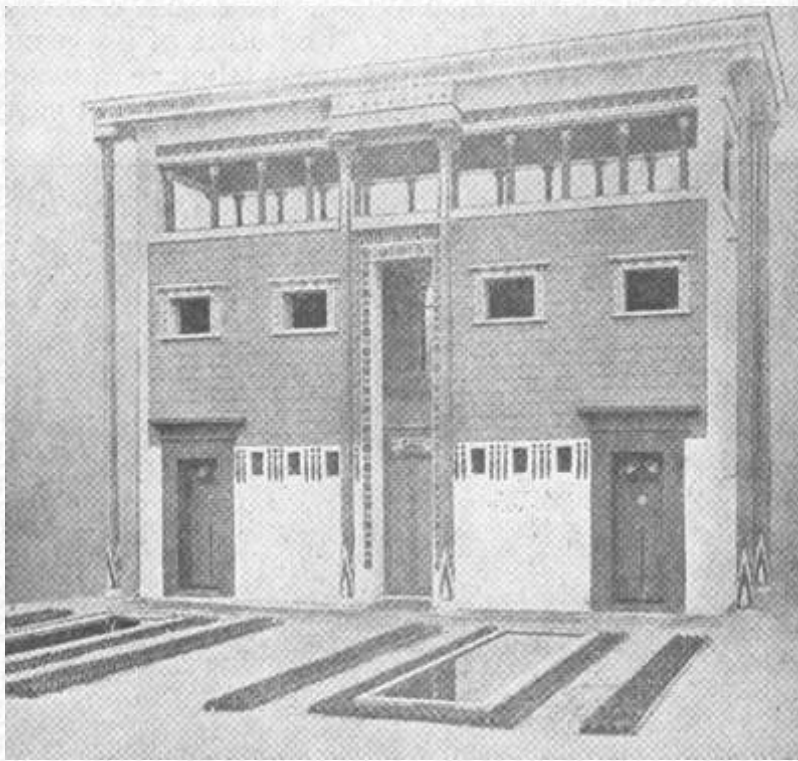
In front was a porch supported on "lotus-bud" columns. The doorway was simple but elegantly proportioned, the bottom often being wider than the top, a common feature of Egyptian design.



The Pool Of An Egyptian Garden - A wall-painting in a tomb. Notice the details.

The windows were just square holes left in the walls, covered with coloured awnings or shutters when required. Often there was a long window in the upper storey, which made the bed-room little more than a sleeping-porch. Pleasant days were spent in punts on the river, fowling and fishing, and there were banquets at night with a good deal of music.

The Egyptians are the only race of the earliest period who have left us anything like what we call literature. They had a good many fairy tales, they wrote love-poems and they alone of the earliest peoples had quite a good sense of humour, which came out in some of their writings and drawings.

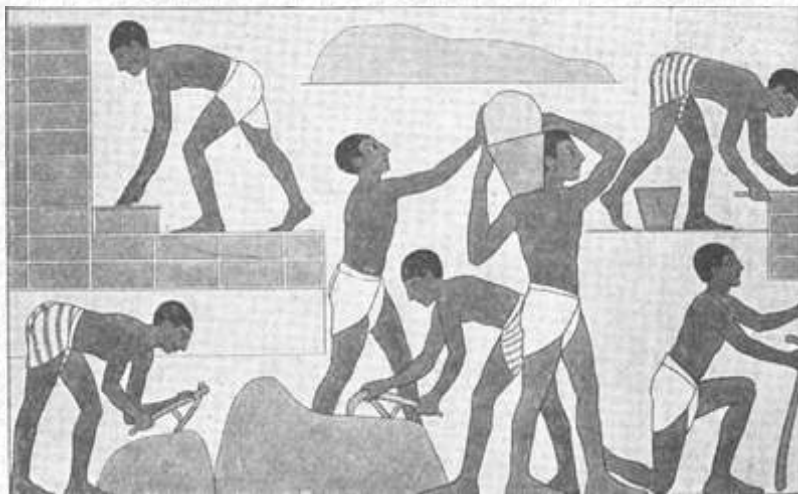


An Egyptian House

This and their obvious interest and pleasure in animals and plants make them seem quite close to us in spirit. We have already seen, in connection with the religion of Akenaton, that they could rise to a lofty idea of a single God, though a good deal of Egyptian religion consisted of the superstitious worship of animal-headed gods. At their best they had equally fine ideas about man's soul.

These arose out of the worship of Osiris, the god who judged men's souls after death.

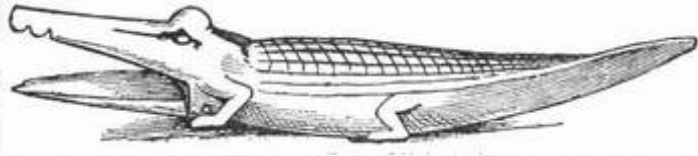
The Egyptians do not seem to have got their idea of the life hereafter clearly thought out but at any rate they had much more definite beliefs than the other nations. At first they believed that a man's physical life went on after death. And that is why so much trouble was taken over the bodies of important people when they died. After elaborate medical treatment the body was wrapped in hundreds of yards of fine linen bandages so that it should not decay for hundreds of years. Corpses treated in this manner are known as mummies.



Making Bricks In Ancient Egypt

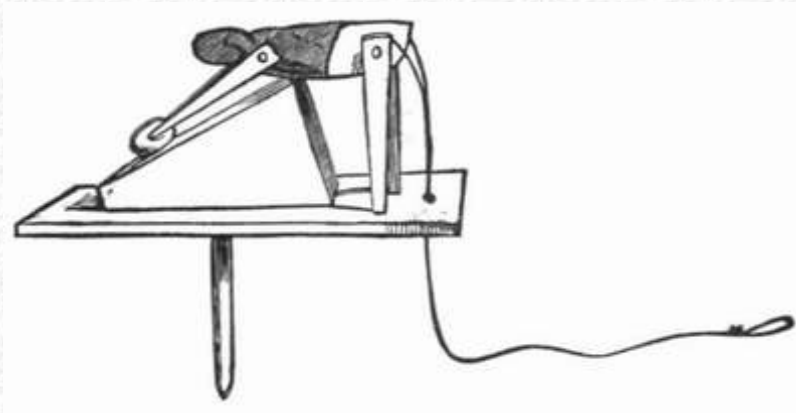
The top of the coffin too was sometimes made into a likeness of the dead person, in case his body decayed. Food and furniture were put into the tomb as well, and, if he were a rich man models of his servants. But when the worship of Osiris developed, there grew up the idea of a soul, which, after a terrifying journey through a demon-haunted hell, passed into a Hall of Judgment, where the soul was examined and

judged. The souls of the evil were devoured at once by monsters, but the virtuous passed on to a heaven which was very much like Egypt at its most pleasant. There was a good deal of superstition in these beliefs, and one could buy from the priests magic spells supposed to ensure a safe journey through Hell, and even a "pass" in the soul's examination.



Egyptian Toy Crocodile With Movable Jaw

Yet in spite of the belief in the soul and the supreme importance of a virtuous life on earth, the elaborate burial practices went on. Corpses were still mummified, and because noblemen wanted slaves to attend to them when they reached their heavenly villas, models of all that a rich man might require were buried with him.



Egyptian Toy Miller

These models were carefully made, and from them we get a very good idea of Egyptian life. The pictures on pp. 36, 75 are photographs of such models.

Exercises

1. Find out all you can about "the Rosetta Stone."
2. Describe the ancient Egyptian objects in your nearest museum.
3. Draw an Egyptian country house or a nobleman in full dress.
4. How can we guess that the boat shown on p. 36 is going down the Nile? What is the man at either end doing?



[TOC](#)

