

Ancient Civilizations of Africa—Egypt

Section 4



MAIN IDEAS

1. Egyptian writing used symbols called hieroglyphics.
2. Egypt's great temples were lavishly decorated.
3. Egyptian art filled tombs.

Key Terms and Places

hieroglyphics Egyptian writing system, one of the world's first, which used symbols

papyrus long-lasting, paper-like substance made from reeds

Rosetta Stone a stone slab discovered in 1799, that was inscribed with hieroglyphics and their Greek meanings

sphinxes imaginary creatures with the bodies of lions and the heads of other animals or humans

obelisk a tall, four-sided pillar that is pointed on top

Section Summary

EGYPTIAN WRITING

Egyptians invented one of the world's first writing systems, using a series of images, symbols, and pictures called **hieroglyphics** (hy-ruh-GLIH-fiks). Each symbol represented one or more sounds in the Egyptian language.

At first hieroglyphics were carved in stone. Later, they were written with brushes and ink on **papyrus** (puh-PY-ruhs). Because papyrus didn't decay, many ancient Egyptian texts still survive, including government records, historical records, science texts, medical manuals, and literary works such as *The Book of the Dead*. The discovery of the **Rosetta Stone** in 1799 provided the key to reading Egyptian writing, as its text was inscribed both in hieroglyphics and in Greek.

What language helped scholars to understand the meaning of hieroglyphics on the Rosetta Stone?

EGYPT'S GREAT TEMPLES

Egyptian architects are known not only for the pyramids but also for their magnificent temples. The temples were lavishly designed with numerous

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statues and beautifully painted walls and pillars. **Sphinxes** and **obelisks** were usually found near the entrances to the temples.

EGYPTIAN ART

Ancient Egyptians were masterful artists and many of their greatest works are found in either the temples or the tombs of the pharaohs. Most Egyptians, however, never saw these paintings, because only kings, priests, or other important people could enter these places.

Egyptian paintings depict a variety of subjects, from crowning kings to illustrating religious rituals to showing scenes from daily life. The paintings also have a particular style, with people drawn as if they were twisting as they walked, and in different sizes depending upon their stature in society. In contrast, animals appear more realistically. The Egyptians were also skilled stone and metal workers, creating beautiful statues and jewelry.

Much of what we know about Egyptian art and burial practices comes from the tomb of King Tutankhamen, one of the few Egyptian tombs that was left untouched by raiders looking for valuables. The tomb was discovered in 1922.

Who got to see ancient Egyptian sculpture and painting?

Why is King Tutankhamen's tomb so important for the study of Egyptian history?

CHALLENGE ACTIVITY

Critical Thinking: Drawing Inferences Using the library or an online resource, find a key to translate Egyptian hieroglyphics into English. Write a message using hieroglyphics and trade with another student to see if you can read each other's messages. Be sure to provide a copy of your message and the translation to your teacher.