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ABSTRACT

This teaching guide discusses ancient Egyptian culture, the lithographs made by Napoleon's scientists in 1798-99 to study and record every aspect of Egypt, the world's subsequent fascination with Egypt, ancient Egyptian architecture, Egyptian writing, and archeologists' illustrations of Egypt. The guide suggests activities for elementary school, middle school, and high school. (BT)

**Views of Ancient Egypt
Teacher's Guide
School Arts: Looking/Learning**

Linda Downs
Carla Brenner

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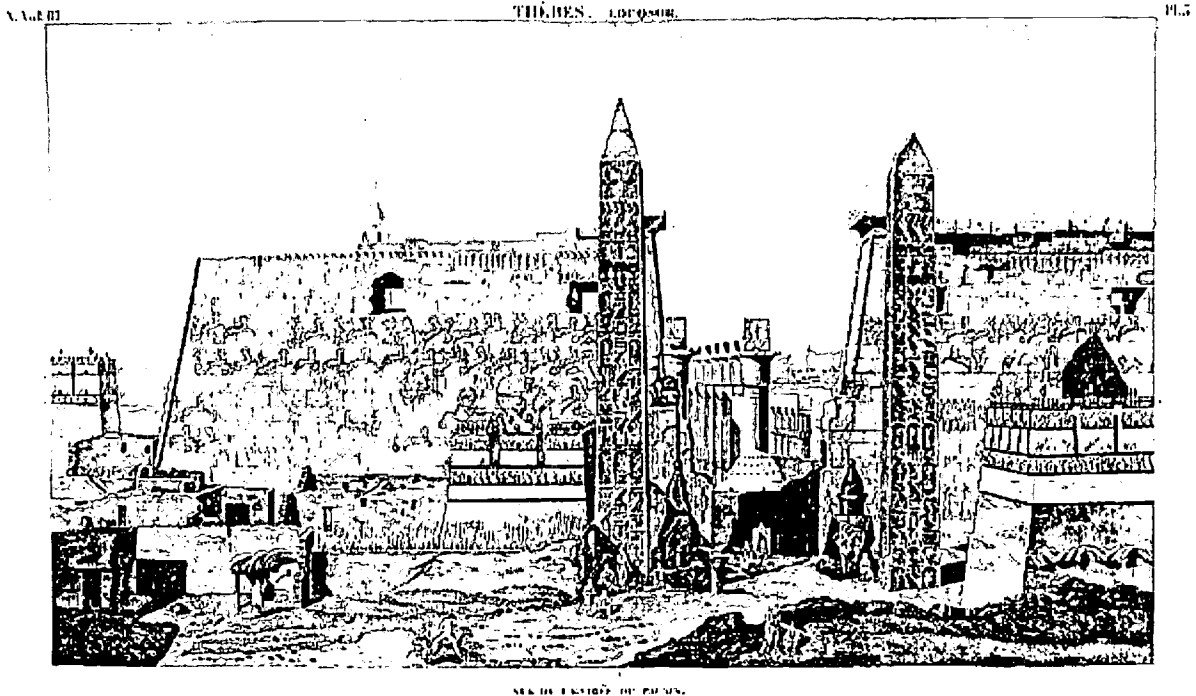
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Views of Ancient Egypt

A Guide for Teachers



Thebes, Luxor, View of the Palace Entrance, 1821, Description de l'Égypte

National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

Views of Ancient Egypt

Teacher's Guide

This teaching guide was prepared by Linda Downs, Head of Education, and Carla Brenner, Coordinator of Interpretive Materials, Education Department, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Additional information is available on the National Gallery's web site at <http://www.nga.gov>

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Views of Ancient Egypt



Egypt has one of the world's longest and best preserved material histories. A tradition of art and architecture was maintained in ancient Egypt for 3,000 years. The Egyptians developed distinctive ways to represent their world. They emphasized the profile view of people and animals and showed sequences of events by painting them in bands, one above another, meant to be viewed in order. Their best known funerary architecture was made in the form of monumental pyramids. Their writing, believed to have been developed from pictographs, evolved into hieroglyphs which can be read both as symbols and syllables.

Ancient Egyptian Culture

Life in ancient Egypt clustered along the Nile River, which runs south to north into the Mediterranean Sea. Each year the Nile overflows its banks, bringing rich silt to fertilize farmers' fields.

The annual flooding of the Nile, the daily rhythm of the sun, and the relative isolation of Egypt (it is situated between two desert areas) lent a stability and continuity to life and religious beliefs.

One way in which the modern world knows about ancient Egypt is through the preservation of its elaborate burials and architectural ruins. The climate is so dry in Egypt that even the most fragile materials such as wood and cloth have been preserved. The Egyptians believed that by painting or sculpting images of everyday life in a tomb, the deceased would receive them again in their second life. Thus, in the most elaborate tombs, every aspect of a person's life was reproduced to provide him or her with a prosperous second life. By studying tombs, archaeologists understand how ancient Egyptians lived and what they believed.

The Lithographs

Under the direction of General Napoléon Bonaparte, the French army occupied Egypt in 1798-1799 and deployed teams of scientists to study and record every aspect of the country. In three years, thousands of drawings were made on the spot in Egypt and were transferred to France where they were copied as lithographs (prints made by drawing with a grease crayon on a stone slab, inking the stone so the ink adheres to the grease, and then pressing paper on the slab through a press to print out the image). The lithographs were published in a four-volume book in 1809. Several editions were published and circulated throughout France and Europe.

You can see both the ancient and the contemporary buildings of Egypt in these lithographs. The artists did not try to isolate the old from the new, but represented each

view just as it appeared to them.

Our Fascination with Egypt

Other ancient cultures viewed Egypt as a mysterious and exotic land. European fascination with Egypt grew in the first century B.C.

A revival of interest in Egypt occurred in the late eighteenth century when drawings circulated widely throughout Europe upon Napoléon's return to France. He also brought back all kinds of sculpture that he put on public view at the Louvre (temporarily renamed Musée Napoléon).

A veritable Egyptomania began to influence art, fashion, interior design, literature, and the theater, culminating in the 1871 creation of the opera *Aïda* by the Italian composer Giuseppe Verdi.

In recent times exhibitions of Egyptian art, such as the 1978 King Tutankhamen exhibition, have drawn millions of viewers.

Ancient Egyptian Architecture

Three distinctive architectural elements were developed in ancient Egypt--the pyramid, the propylaeum or pylon, and the obelisk. Pyramid-like structures first appeared in the ancient Near East in the form of stepped buildings called ziggurats. Smooth-sided pyramids that first appeared in the Old Kingdom about 2600 B.C. were the first major tombs to be built by the pharaohs. But these tomb chambers were soon vandalized. Later pharaohs then hid their tombs in natural rocks or underground in what are called mastaba tombs.

The propylaeum, or pylon, is a large wall used at the entrance to temples and palaces. In some periods in Egypt the pylons were carved with reliefs and painted. They serve as a physical and symbolic doorway from the outside world into a sacred or royal space.

The obelisk is a tall pointed column peculiar to Egypt. It was used for public inscriptions. Obelisks declared who the ruler was and were occasionally set up to commemorate important anniversaries and religious events. The Washington Monument in Washington, D.C. is an obelisk that was constructed in honor of President George Washington. It is based on the ancient Egyptian form of the obelisk, although it is much larger than those of ancient times.

Egyptian Writing

The ancient Egyptians developed a system of writing using hieroglyphs. In the nineteenth century, a French team of scientists and artists recorded every hieroglyph they encountered even though no one could understand them! People had long forgotten how to read them. A stone slab with ancient writing on it was found by

French engineers led by Captain Bouchard in a town called Rosetta in Lower Egypt. The stone was carefully drawn and was included in the lithographs of the Description of Egypt. The stone contained Greek, hieroglyphs, and an ancient form of writing, called Demotic, that evolved from hieroglyphs. It was from the lithographic drawing of this stone that thirty-two years later hieroglyphs were deciphered by Jean François Champollion. Now archaeologists are able to learn the hieroglyphic alphabet and read ancient inscriptions.

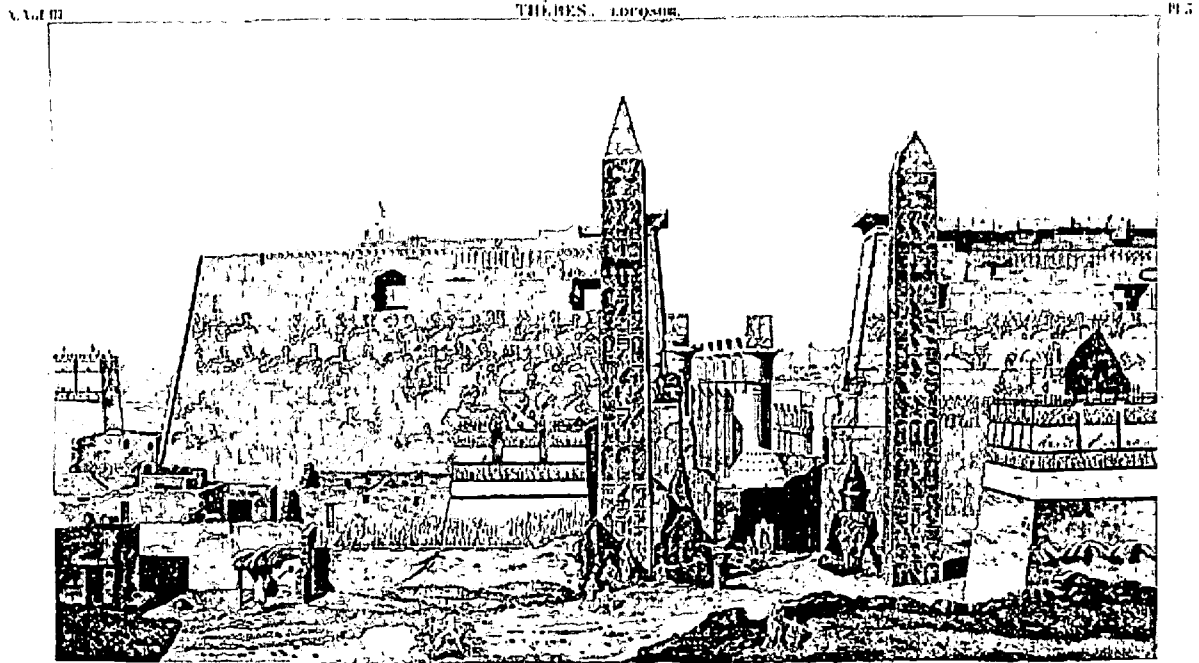
Some hieroglyphs are read as signs of the objects they illustrate, while others are syllables used to construct words. In ancient Egypt very few people could read and write. The position of scribe was important in the hierarchy of the royal court, and scribes had special privileges. It was believed that writing captured the spirit of the object it described, so that the scribes carried out magic by the mere act of writing. Writing was considered an art and a sacred act.

Archaeological Illustration

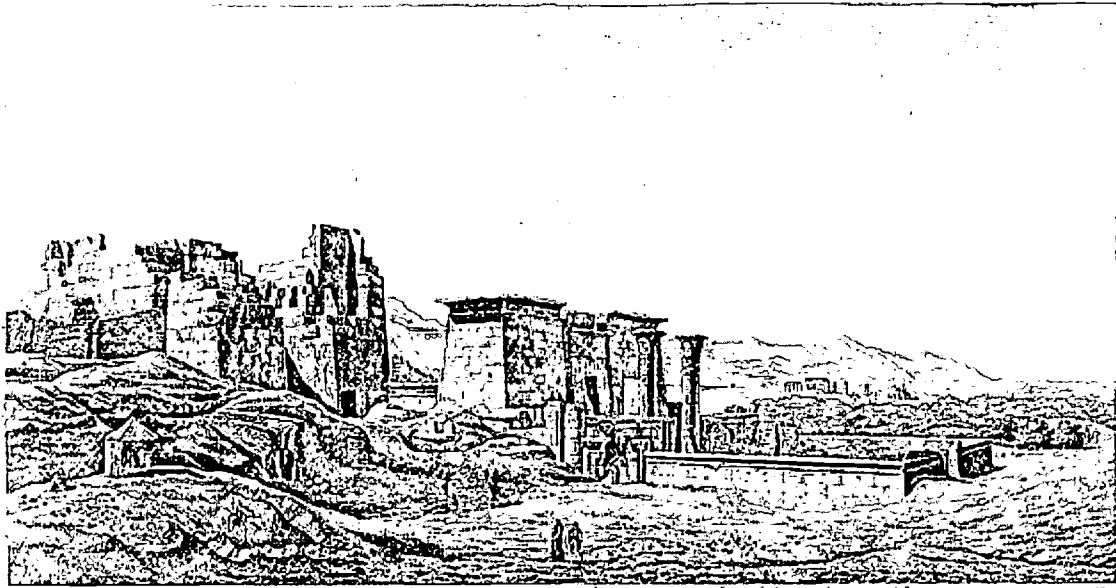
When the French Scientific Committee Set out to study and record the archaeology of Egypt in the early nineteenth century, photography had not yet been invented. Instead, artists were included in the expedition team to make careful drawings of ancient objects and sites. As ancient monuments continue to weather and suffer damage from pollution or vandalism, these nineteenth century records of their appearance become increasingly important. Many of the details they illustrate can no longer be seen today.

For modern archaeologists, although they can call on advanced photographic techniques and other recording methods, draftsmanship remains an important tool of archaeological field work. Some types of surfaces are better recorded in drawings than photographs. Archaeological illustration is invaluable for shallow reliefs and small objects like stone seals, flint tools, or stone beads, and it is indispensable for cataloging pottery. In brief, shorthand fashion, a simple scale drawing can record the shape of a pot, its structure, and its decoration, both inside and outside.

Views of Ancient Egypt

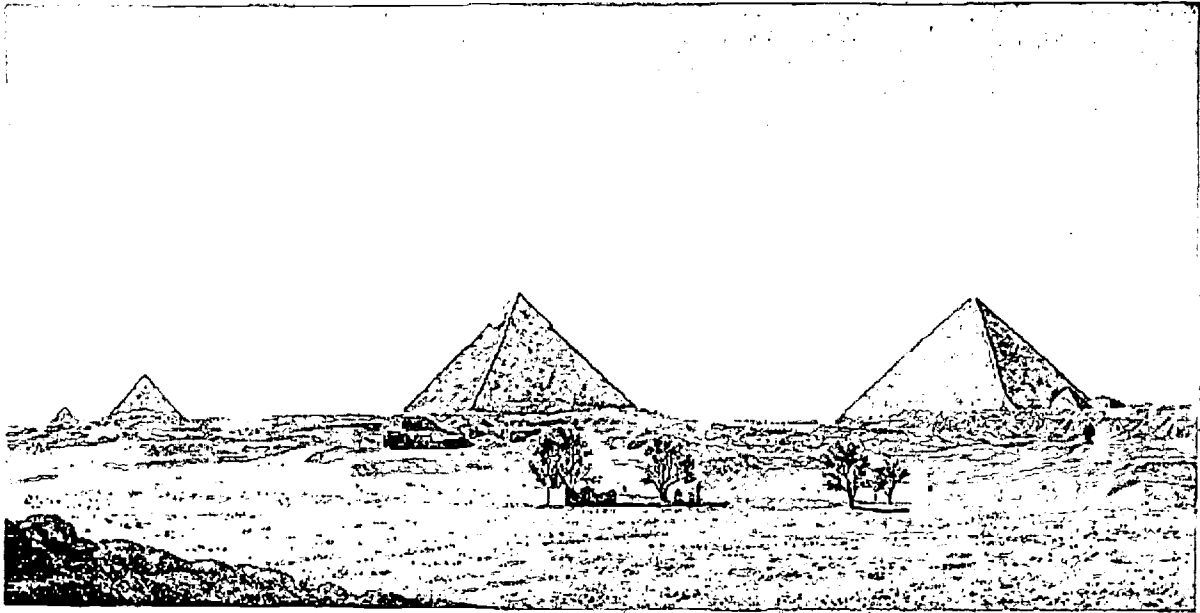


Thebes, Luxor, View of the Palace Entrance, 1821



THE THEBES, MEDINET-ABOU, 1821. Description de l'Égypte.

Thebes, Medenet-abou, 1821 Description de l'Égypte



THE PYRAMIDS OF MEMPHIS, 1821. Description de l'Égypte.

Pyramids of Memphis, 1821 Description de l'Égypte

ACTIVITIES

Elementary

Draw the two distinct architectural forms of ancient Egypt (obelisk and pyramid) and describe their use. Look up hieroglyphs in an encyclopedia and write your name using them.

Middle/Junior High School

Have students make archeological drawings of found objects. Measurements taken at various points will keep the image accurate. By using graph paper to transfer the image, the scale can be changed. Have you heard of pyramid power? Some people believe that the shape of a pyramid carries special kinds of energy. Create a pyramid out of coat hangers and place it over a plant. After a week, do you see any difference in the plant?

High School

A common technique for studying inscriptions is to produce what is called a "squeeze." This is done by making an impression of the letters with damp (undyed) blotter paper. Once dried, the paper is relatively sturdy and, of course, easier to handle than stone! Try a "squeeze" on grave markers or public monuments. Perhaps your school has a cornerstone date or a lobby dedication that might be used. (Remember to get permission first.)

Ancient Egyptian History

Ancient Egyptian history is divided into five major periods:

Early Dynastic Period

3000-2680 B.C.; dynasties I-II

Old Kingdom 2600-2260 B.C.;
dynasties III-VI

Middle Kingdom 2260-1790
B.C.; dynasties XI-XII

New Kingdom 1790-1085 B.C.;
dynasties XVIII-XX

Late Period 1085-332 B.C.;
dynasties XXI-XXV



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