Ancient Egypt and the Nile

Egyptian culture has been called “the gift of the Nile.” Without the Nile River, Egypt might never have existed. Most of Egypt was dry, barren desert. Along the Nile, though, the land was different. Yearly floods brought fertile soil to the river valley. When the floods ended, farmers began planting. While the water level was low, they grew crops.

Farmers knew the Nile would flood every year, but in other ways the floods were unpredictable. Sometimes the flood level was low. Then farmers could not raise enough food. If the water rose too high, fields and homes were destroyed. The ancient Egyptians had to find ways to control the river. They built canals to carry water to inland fields. They built up the riverbanks to keep the floods from causing damage.

The Nile brought other gifts, too. One gift was transportation. Boats carried goods and people from one part of Egypt to another. Transportation made trade profitable. The Nile also provided natural resources. Egyptians used its mud to make pottery and bricks. They made a paperlike material called papyrus from a plant that grew along the banks.

The Great Builders

Daily life in ancient Egypt revolved around religion. The land was filled with temples. A strong belief in the afterlife led the people to build pyramids as tombs for their pharaohs. All families had to help with the pyramids. They could work as laborers or bring food for the workers. Hieroglyphics, ancient Egyptian picture writing, helped project leaders keep track of workers and supplies.

Building pyramids was hard because there were no cutting tools or machines. The work was important, though. The people believed that pharaohs were related to the gods. Pharaohs were not only important in government, but they were also religious figures.

Only wealthy, important Egyptians were buried in pyramids. All people prepared for the afterlife, though. They preserved, or mummified, their dead relatives. They filled tombs with objects for the dead to use in the afterlife.