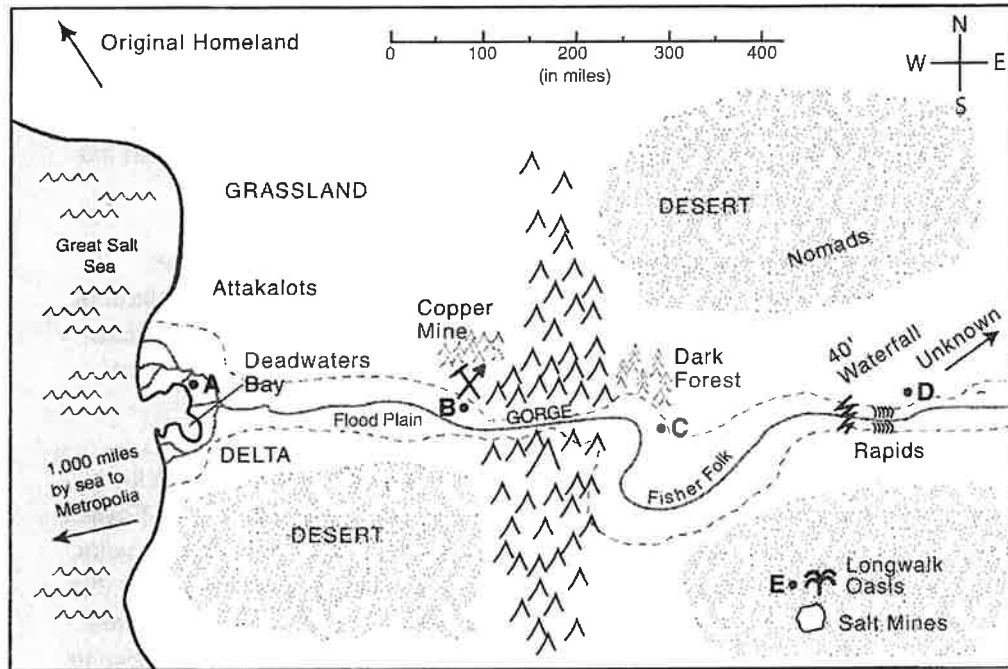


## Hook Exercise: Finding a New Homeland

**Directions:** It is several centuries before the time of Jesus of Nazareth. You are an elder in a goat-herding tribe of 500 people. Unfriendly raiders from the north are forcing you off your land. You send out a small party of men, armed mostly with your prayers, to search for a new homeland. Six months later, they return. That evening, around a large bonfire, the scouting party presents a rough map to the Council of Elders with five possible settlement sites.

Examine the map with a fellow elder and discuss the pros and cons of each option. Which option is best?



<p><b>Site A</b> Pros:</p> <p>Cons:</p>	<p><b>Site B</b> Pros:</p> <p>Cons:</p>	<p><b>Site C</b> Pros:</p> <p>Cons:</p>
<p><b>Site D</b> Pros:</p> <p>Cons:</p>		<p><b>Site E</b> Pros:</p> <p>Cons:</p>

Which site will you recommend to the council? Why?

## How Did the Nile Shape Ancient Egypt?

In today's society, it is easy to forget the importance of rivers. Ours is a world of highways and airports, of supermarkets and shopping malls. When we travel or want food, we don't think "river." When we bathe or get thirsty, we think shower or bottled water.

This has not always been the case. In fact, four of the world's most important ancient cultures are known by historians as the "river civilizations." These were Mesopotamia on the Tigris-Euphrates River, China on the Yangtze ("yang-see"), India on the Indus, and Egypt on the Nile. They are called the river civilizations because of the powerful influence a large river system had on the lives of the people. And nowhere was this more true than in the ancient kingdom of Egypt.

Perhaps the most stunning fact about Egypt is its age. The first pharaoh began his rule in 2920 BCE, nearly 5,000 years ago. From this early beginning, Egypt has been a land of contrasts, a place of hot, sunny days and cold nights, of crop-laden fields and empty desert. In its early days, Egypt was two distinct kingdoms. To the south was Upper Egypt, where the Nile flows north out of the mountains. To the north was Lower Egypt where the river spreads into a delta before emptying into the Mediterranean. Egyptians also spoke of the "**Black Land**" and the "**Red Land**." The Black Land hugged the Nile. The Red Land was the desert just beyond. The Black Land represented life. The Red Land meant danger. For Egyptians, the Nile literally meant the difference between life and death.

The source of the Nile was a mystery to the ancient Egyptians. Now we know that one branch, called the Blue Nile, begins in Lake Tana in the highlands of Ethiopia. The other main branch, the White Nile, begins with the waters that flow into and then out of Lake Victoria in Kenya. Every

year, when heavy rains fall in central Africa, the **tributaries** of the Blue and White Nile grow full and flow into the main river. The mother Nile, its waters replenished, then flows north and into Egypt. There, the water spills over its banks and covers the low-lying flood plain. For thousands of years, this flooding cycle has provided a seasonal rhythm for the Egyptian people.

The flooding cycle determined the planting season for farmers. Their main crops were barley and emmer wheat for making bread and beer. People paid their taxes in wheat, and wheat was a main export. Farmers also grew flax for producing fine linen, and harvested **papyrus** from the marshy areas along the river and in the delta. **Irrigation** channels from the Nile flowed to smaller gardens where farmers grew vegetables such as onions, beans, and cucumbers. Date, fig, and pomegranate trees were tended along the river.

While fruits, grains, and vegetables might sound like the makings of a healthful diet, one ingredient of Egyptian meals was definitely not good: desert sand. Sand was everywhere, easily settling into the dough for flat bread, a basic food eaten by everyone. Once the ever-present sand ground down a person's teeth, infection and pain set in. Thus, dental disease became a common medical problem in Ancient Egypt.

Let's time-travel to this fertile yet hostile land where life revolved around the ebb and flow of a single waterway. On the following pages are five documents that provide a glimpse of Egyptian life thousands of years ago. As you read the documents, think about how the Nile gave rise to a civilization that, all this time later, continues to fascinate. Then answer the question: *How did the Nile shape Ancient Egypt?*



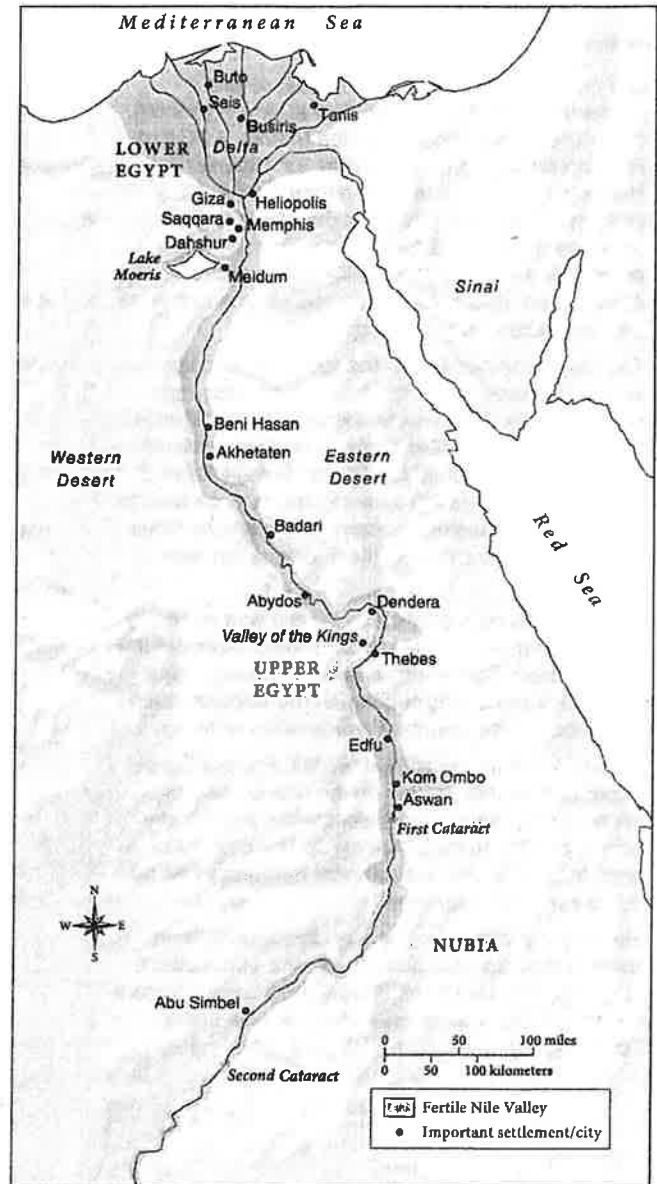
## Document A

Source: Map created from various sources.

## Document Analysis

1. The Nile is the world's longest river, 4,160 miles. Consider the southern boundary of Ancient Egypt to be at Aswan (the first cataract, or rapids). About how many miles of the Nile are actually in Egypt?
2. Why is the delta region to the north called "Lower Egypt"?
3. What were the eastern, western and northern boundaries of Egyptian settlement?
4. Given the geography of this area, do you think Egypt was vulnerable to foreign invaders? Explain your thinking.

## Egypt circa 1500 BCE



5. What do you notice about population distribution and settlement location in Ancient Egypt? List three reasons for this.

## Document B

Source: Chart adapted from Katherine Hinds, *Life in Ancient Egypt: The Countryside*, Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2007.

## The Nile River Flood Cycle

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<b>Akhet</b> (flood season) Mid-June to mid-October	Fields in the Nile floodplain covered in water and fertilized by a new batch of silt. Time when many farmers worked off their public-labor tax, doing jobs like canal repair or quarrying.
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<b>Peret</b> (planting & growing season) Mid-October to mid-February	Waters receded but Nile high enough to fill irrigation canals; crops planted and tended.
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<b>Shemu</b> (harvest season) Mid-February to mid-June	Crops in the Lower Nile harvested and sent to market.
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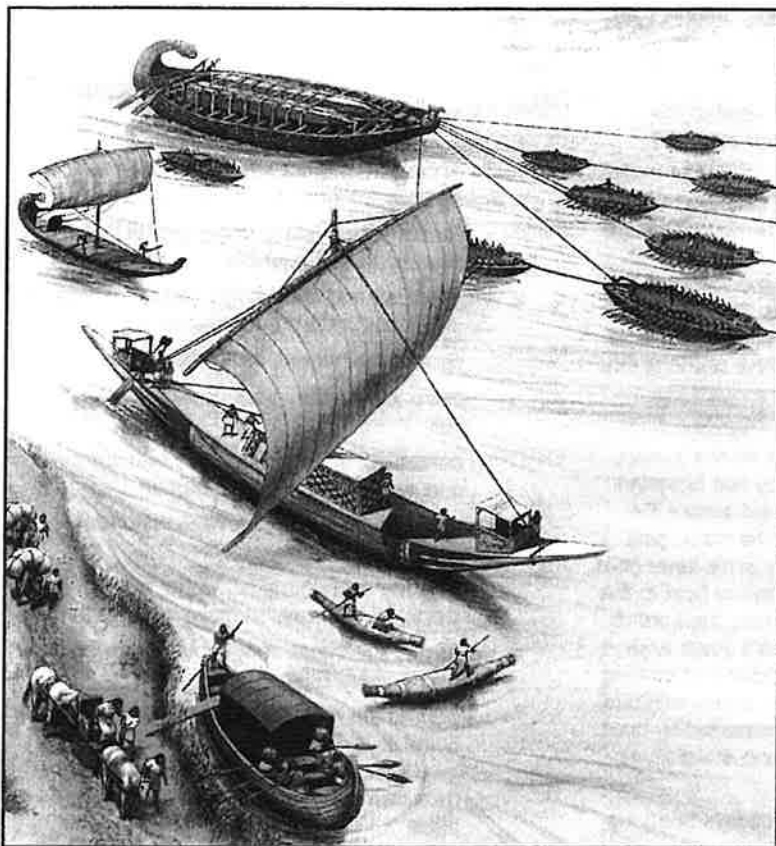
**Note:** Average rainfall, historically and today, has remained about the same. The Nile delta receives about four inches per year. The Nile Valley south of Cairo and Giza receives less than one inch. In comparison, Atlanta, Georgia, gets about 50 inches of rain annually and Phoenix, Arizona, about eight inches.

## Document Analysis

1. ~~What differences do you see between the Egyptian seasons and the standard seasons in much of the United States today?~~
2. Usually the flood season produced a “good Nile,” just the right amount of water. What might be the consequences of a “bad Nile”—too much or too little water?
3. The population of Ancient Egypt was probably about one million, 95 percent of whom were farmers. According to the chart, when were farmers busiest?
4. When would this large work force of farmers be available to work on government projects, like building palaces and tombs?
5. How does this document help you answer the question: How did the Nile shape Ancient Egypt?

## Document C

Source: Illustration by Oliver Frey in *Living in Ancient Egypt*, Norman Bancroft Hunt, editor, Thalamus Publishing, 2009.



**Note:** The Nile River flows south to north against a prevailing northerly wind. In ancient times, boats traveling upstream against the Nile current used a sail or rowers or both. Boats traveling downstream to the north often just floated with the help of steering oars. The Nile current was about four knots (4 mph) during flood season. It slowed to a sluggish one knot (1 mph) during the rest of the year.

## Document Analysis

1. What is being transported by the barge (the vessel pulled by tugboats)?
2. What is likely being carried by the large sailboat?
3. What direction are the sailboats, barge, and tugs traveling? Explain your reasoning.
4. Drawing from evidence in the document, what are five occupations in Egypt that depended, in some way, on the Nile River?
5. How does this document help you answer the question: How did the Nile shape Ancient Egypt?

