

## Ancient Egyptian Contributions to Civilization

### 1. System of Writing

The Egyptians developed one of the earliest systems of writing called “hieroglyphics”, which are picture symbols that represent objects, ideas, or sounds. First inscribed on stone, these symbols were later written in ink on specially prepared plant material called “papyrus” (the origin of the word “paper”). The ancient Egyptians recorded their history, literature, mathematics, scientific knowledge, religious rituals, and government records on papyrus scrolls. To house their papyrus scrolls, the Egyptians established the first libraries.



The key to translation of hieroglyphics was the “Rosetta Stone”. This slab was unearthed in the town of Rosetta in the Nile delta in 1799 by one of Napoleon’s soldiers (Pierre-Francois Bouchard). The Rosetta Stone bears the same inscription in both Egyptian hieroglyphics and Greek letters. In 1822, Jean Champollion, a French scholar, used his knowledge of Greek to decipher the hieroglyphics.

### 2. Geometry and Astronomy

The Egyptians used geometrics principles to build pyramids and other structures. They also developed the first calendar that divided the year into 365 days. It was more accurate than the previous “lunar” calendar, based on the revolutions of the moon around the earth. Introduced about 4,200 B.C., the Egyptians solar-year calendar is the basis of the calendar we use today.

### 3. Biology and Medicine

Egyptians obtained knowledge of the human body through the process of embalming and mummification. Egyptian doctors preformed surgery, set broken bones, recognized disease symptoms and prescribed drugs.

### 4. Building

Egyptian architects and engineers built magnificent stone pyramids, palaces, temples, statues, dams and irrigation canals. The “Great Pyramid” at Giza still stands today as a symbol of the great power of the Egyptian pharaohs. A huge statue carved from rock called the “Great Sphinx” guarded the Great Pyramid at Giza. The most famous temple is the “Temple of Karnak” near the city of Thebes.

### 5. Art

The Egyptians were accomplished sculptors who created huge stone statues. On the stone walls of temples and tombs, artists carved and painted domestic and historical scenes. Egyptian workers skillfully designed delicate metal jewelry, elaborate wood furniture and beautiful pottery.

## Questions to Answer

1. Why did the Egyptians develop “hieroglyphics”?
2. How did the Egyptians use geometry and astronomy?
3. How did the Egyptians use biology and medicine?
4. How did the Egyptians use architecture and engineering?