**The Persian Civilisation**

The Persian Empire is the name given to a series of dynasties centered in modern-day Iran that spanned several centuries—from the sixth century B.C. to the twentieth century A.D. The first Persian Empire, founded by Cyrus the Great around 550 B.C., became one of the largest empires in history, stretching from Europe’s Balkan Peninsula in the West to India’s Indus Valley in the East. This Iron Age dynasty, sometimes called the Achaemenid Empire, was a global hub of culture, religion, science, art and technology for more than 200 years before it fell to the invading armies of Alexander the Great.

**Cyrus the Great**

The Persian Empire started as a collection of semi-nomadic tribes who raised sheep, goats and cattle on the Iranian plateau.

Cyrus the Great—the leader of one such tribe—began to defeat nearby kingdoms, including Media, Lydia and [Babylon](https://www.history.com/topics/ancient-middle-east/babylonia), joining them under one rule. He founded the first Persian Empire, also known as the Achaemenid Empire, in 550 B.C.

The first Persian Empire under Cyrus the Great soon became the world’s first superpower. It united under one government three important sites of early human civilization in the ancient world: [Mesopotamia](https://www.history.com/topics/mesopotamia), [Egypt](https://www.history.com/topics/ancient-egypt)’s Nile Valley and [India](https://www.history.com/topics/india)’s Indus Valley.

Cyrus the Great is immortalized in the Cyrus Cylinder, a clay cylinder inscribed in 539 BC with the story of how he conquered Babylon from King Nabonidus, bringing an end to the Neo-Babylonian empire.

Darius the Great, the fourth king of the Achaemenid Empire, ruled over the Persian Empire when it was at its largest, stretching from The Caucasus and West Asia to what was then Macedonia (today’s Balkans), the Black Sea, Central Asia, and even into Africa including parts of Libya and Egypt. He unified the empire through introducing standard currency and weights and measures; making Aramaic the official language and building roads. The Behistun Inscription, a multilingual relief carved into Mount Behistun in Western Iran, extolls his virtues and was a critical key to deciphering cuneiform script. Its impact is compared that of the [Rosetta Stone](https://www.history.com/news/what-is-the-rosetta-stone), the tablet that enabled scholars to decipher Egyptian hieroglyphics.

**Where Is Persia?**

At its height under Darius the Great, the Persian Empire stretched from Europe’s Balkan Peninsula—in parts of what is present day Bulgaria, Romania, and Ukraine—to the Indus River Valley in northwest India and south to Egypt.

The Persians were the first people to establish regular routes of communication between three continents—Africa, Asia and Europe. They built many new roads and developed the world’s first postal service.

**The Persian Culture**

The ancient Persians of the Achaemenid Empire created art in many forms, including metalwork, rock carvings, weaving and architecture. As the Persian Empire expanded to encompass other artistic centers of early civilization, a new style was formed with influences from these sources.

Early Persian art included large, carved rock reliefs cut into cliffs, such as those found at Naqsh-e Rustam, an ancient cemetery filled with the tombs of Achaemenid kings. The elaborate rock murals depict equestrian scenes and battle victories.

Ancient Persians were also known for their metalwork. In the 1870s, smugglers discovered gold and silver artifacts among ruins near the Oxus River in present-day Tajikistan.

The artifacts included a small golden chariot, coins and bracelets decorated in a griffon motif. (The griffon is a mythical creature with the wings and head of an eagle and the body of a lion, and a symbol of the Persian capital of Persepolis.)

British diplomats and members of the military serving in Pakistan brought roughly 180 of these gold and silver pieces—known as the Oxus Treasure—to London where they are now housed at the [British Museum](http://www.britishmuseum.org/).

The history of carpet weaving in Persia dates back to the nomadic tribes. The ancient Greeks prized the artistry of these hand-woven rugs—famous for their elaborate design and bright colors. Today, most Persian rugs are made of wool, silk, and cotton.

**Persepolis**

Embossed bas relief carvings of servants bringing gifts to the king on the sidewall of stairs in front of Tachara Palace, also known as the Palace of Darius, in Persepolis.

Borna Mir/Getty Images

The ancient Persian capital city of Persepolis, situated in southern Iran, ranks among the world’s greatest archeological sites. It was named a [UNESCO World Heritage Site](http://whc.unesco.org/en/about/) in 1979.

The Achaemenian palaces of Persepolis were built upon massive terraces. They were decorated with ornamental facades that included the long rock relief carvings for which the ancient Persians were famous.

**The Persian Religion**

Many people think of Persia as synonymous with [Islam](https://www.history.com/topics/islam), though Islam only became the dominant religion in the Persian Empire after the Arab conquests of the seventh century. The first Persian Empire was shaped by a different religion: [Zoroastrianism](https://www.history.com/topics/zoroastrianism).

Named after the Persian prophet Zoroaster (also known as Zarathustra), Zoroastrianism is one of the world's oldest monotheistic religions. It’s still practiced today as a minority religion in parts of Iran and India.

Zoroaster, who likely lived sometime between 1500 and 500 B.C., taught followers to worship one god instead of the many deities worshipped by earlier Indo-Iranian groups.

The Achaemenian kings were devout Zoroastrians. By most accounts, Cyrus the Great was a tolerant ruler who allowed his subjects to speak their own languages and practice their own religions. While he ruled by the Zoroastrian law of asha (truth and righteousness), he didn’t impose Zoroastrianism on the people of Persia’s conquered territories.

Hebrew scriptures praise Cyrus the Great for freeing the Jewish people of Babylon from captivity and allowing them to return to [Jerusalem](https://www.history.com/topics/history-of-jerusalem).

Subsequent rulers in the Achaemenid Empire followed Cyrus the Great’s hands-off approach to social and religious affairs, allowing Persia’s diverse citizenry to continue practicing their own ways of life. This period of time is sometimes called the Pax Persica, or Persian Peace.

**Fall of the Persian Empire**

The Battle of Issus between Alexander the Great and Darius III in 333 BC, leading to the fall of the Persian Empire.

Leemage/Corbis/Getty Images

The Persian Empire entered a period of decline after a failed invasion of [Greece](https://www.history.com/topics/ancient-history/ancient-greece) by Xerxes I in 480 BC. The costly defense of Persia’s lands depleted the empire’s funds, leading to heavier taxation among Persia’s subjects.

The Achaemenid dynasty finally fell to the invading armies of [Alexander the Great](https://www.history.com/topics/ancient-history/alexander-the-great) of Macedon in 330 B.C. Subsequent rulers sought to restore the Persian Empire to its Achaemenian boundaries, though the empire never quite regained the enormous size it had achieved under Cyrus the Great.

**The Egyptian Civilisation**

The basic element in the lengthy history of Egyptian civilization is geography. The Nile River rises from the lakes of central Africa as the White Nile and from the mountains of Ethiopia as the Blue Nile. The White and Blue Nile meet at Khartoum and flow together northward to the Nile delta, where the 4000 mile course of this river spills into the Mediterranean Sea.

[](http://www.historyguide.org/ancient/egypt_res.html)Less than two inches of rain per year falls in the delta and rain is relatively unknown in other parts of Egypt. Most of the land is uninhabitable. These geographical factors have determined the character of Egyptian civilization. People could farm only along the banks of the Nile, where arid sand meets the fertile soil. Of course, each summer the Nile swells as the rains pour down and the snow melts on the mountains. The river overflows its banks and floods the land with fresh water and deposits a thick layer of rich alluvial soil. The land would then yield two harvests before winter. This yearly flood determined more than just the agricultural needs of early Egypt. It also determined the lifecycle of society and helped to create the world view of ancient Egyptian civilization.

The basic source of Egyptian history is a list of rulers compiled in c.280 B.C. by Manetho for the Macedonians who ruled Egypt. Manetho divided Egyptian kings into thirty dynasties (a 31st was added later) in the following manner.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **NAME** | **DYNASTY** | **YEARS** |
| Archaic Period | 1-2 | 3100-2700 B.C. |
| Old Kingdom | 3-6 | 2700-2200 B.C. |
| Intermediate Period 1 | 7-10 | 2200-2050 B.C. |
| Middle Kingdom | 11-12 | 2050-1800 B.C. |
| Intermediate Period 2 | 13-17 | 1800-1570 B.C. |
| New Kingdom | 18-20 | 1570-1085 B.C. |
| Post-Empire (Int 3+ late period) | 21-31 | 1085-332 B.C. |

Early Egypt was divided into two kingdoms, one in Upper Egypt (Nile Valley), and one in Lower Egypt (Nile delta). Remember, the Nile flows from south to north.

**Egyptian Dynasties**
[Menes](http://touregypt.net/01dyn01.htm) (or Narmer) unified Upper and Lower Egypt and established his capital at Memphis around 3000 B.C.. By the time of the Old Kingdom, the land had been consolidated under the central power of a king, who was also the "owner" of all Egypt. Considered to be divine, he stood above the priests and was the only individual who had direct contact with the gods. The economy was a royal monopoly and so there was no word in Egyptian for "trader." Under the king was a carefully graded hierarchy of officials, ranging from the governors of provinces down through local mayors and tax collectors. The entire system was supported by the work of slaves, peasants and artisans.

The Old Kingdom reached its highest stage of development in the Fourth Dynasty. The most tangible symbols of this period of greatness are the three enormous pyramids built as the tombs of kings at Giza between 2600 and 2500. The largest, [Khufu](http://touregypt.net/04dyn02.htm) (called Cheops by the Greeks), was originally 481 feet high and 756 feet long on each side. Khufu was made up of 2.3 million stone blocks averaging 2.5 tons each. In the 5th century B.C. the Greek historian [Herodotus](http://www.isidore-of-seville.com/herodotus/) tells us that the pyramid took 100,000 men and twenty years to build. The pyramids are remarkable not only for their technical engineering expertise, but also for what they tell us about royal power at the time. They are evidence that Egyptian kings had enormous wealth as well as the power to concentrate so much energy on a personal project.

The priests, an important body within the ruling caste, were a social force working to modify the king's supremacy. Yielding to the demands of the priests of Re, a sun god, kings began to call themselves "sons of Re," adding his name as a suffix to their own. Re was also worshipped in temples that were sometimes larger than the pyramids of later kings.

In the Old Kingdom, royal power was absolute. The pharaoh (the term originally meant "great house" or "palace"), governed his kingdom through his family and appointed officials. The lives of the peasants and artisans was carefully regulated: their movement was limited and they were taxed heavily. Luxury accompanied the pharaoh in life and in death and he was raised to an exalted level by his people. The Egyptians worked for the pharaoh and obeyed him because he was a living god on whom the entire fabric of social life depended. No codes of law were needed since the pharaoh was the direct source of all law.

In such a world, government was merely one aspect of religion and religion dominated Egyptian life. The [gods of Egypt](http://interoz.com/egypt/gods1.htm) came in many forms: animals, humans and natural forces. Over time, Re, the sun god, came to assume a dominant place in Egyptian religion.

The Egyptians had a very clear idea of the afterlife. They took great care to bury their dead according to convention and supplied the grave with things that the departed would need for a pleasant life after death. The pharaoh and some nobles had their bodies preserved in a process of [mummification](http://www.desk.nl/~pdenijs/faraos.html). Their tombs were decorated with paintings, food was provided at burial and after. Some tombs even included full sized sailing vessels for the voyage to heaven and beyond. At first, only pharaohs were thought to achieve eternal life, however, nobles were eventually included, and finally all Egyptians could hope for immortality.

The Egyptians also developed a system of writing. Although the idea may have come from Mesopotamia, the script was independent of the cuneiform. Egyptian writing began as pictographic and was later combined with sound signs to produce a difficult and complicated script that the Greeks called hieroglyphics ("sacred carvings"). Though much of what we have today is preserved on wall paintings and carvings, most of Egyptian writing was done with pen and ink on fine paper (papyrus). In 1798 Napoleon invaded Egypt as part of his Grand Empire. He brought with a Commission of Science and Arts composed of more than one hundred scientists, engineers and mathematicians. In 1799 the Commission discovered a basalt fragment on the west bank of the Nile at Rachid. The fragment is now known by its English name, the [Rosetta Stone](http://pw1.netcom.com/~qkstart/rosetta.html). The Egyptian hieroglyphics found on the Rosetta Stone were eventually deciphered in 1822 by [Jean François Champollion](http://www.ankhonline.com/champoll.htm) (1790-1832), a French scholar who had mastered Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Syriac, Ethiopic, Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit and Coptic. The Rosetta Stone contains three inscriptions. The uppermost is written in hieroglyphics; the second in what is now called demotic, the common script of ancient Egypt; and the third in Greek. Champollion guessed that the three inscriptions contained the same text and so he spent the next fourteen years (1808-1822) working from the Greek to the demotic and finally to the hieroglyphics until he had deciphered the whole text. The Rosetta Stone is now on display at the [British Museum](http://www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/world/egypt/egypt.html) in London.

During the period of the Middle Kingdom (2050-1800 B.C.) the power of the pharaohs of the Old Kingdom waned as priests and nobles gained more independence and influence. The governors of the regions of Egypt (*nomes*) gained hereditary claim to their offices and subsequently their families acquired large estates. About 2200 B.C. the Old Kingdom collapsed and gave way to the decentralization of the First Intermediate Period (2200-2050 B.C.). Finally, the *nomarchs* of Thebes in Upper Egypt gained control of the country and established the Middle Kingdom.

The rulers of the Twelfth Dynasty restored the power of the pharaoh over the whole of Egypt although they could not control the *nomarchs*. They brought order and peace to Egypt and encouraged trade northward toward Palestine and south toward Ethiopia. They moved the capital back to Memphis and gave great prominence to Amon, a god connected with the city of Thebes. He became identified with Re, emerging as Amon-Re.

The Middle Kingdom disintegrated in the Thirteenth Dynasty with the resurgence of the power of the *nomarchs*. Around 1700 B.C. Egypt suffered an invasion by the Hyksos who came from the east (perhaps Palestine or Syria) and conquered the Nile Delta. In 1575 B.C., a Thebian dynasty drove out the Hyksos and reunited the kingdom. In reaction to the humiliation of the Second Intermediate Period, the pharaohs of the Eighteenth Dynasty, most notably Thutmose III (1490-1436 B.C.), created an absolute government based on a powerful army and an Egyptian empire extending far beyond the Nile Valley.

One of the results of these imperialistic ventures of the pharaohs was the growth in power of the priests of Amon and the threat it posed to the pharaoh. When young Amenhotep IV (1367-1350 B.C.) came to the throne he was apparently determined to resist the priesthood of Amon. Supported by his family he ultimately made a clean break with the worship of Amon-Re. He moved his capital from Thebes (the center of Amon worship) to a city three hundred miles to the north at a place now called [El Amarna](http://interoz.com/egypt/amarna.htm). Its god was Aton, the physical disk of the sun, and the new city was called Akhenaton. The pharaoh changed his name to [Akhenaton](http://mars.wnec.edu/~grempel/courses/wc1/lectures/03akhenaton.html) ("it pleases Aton"). The new god was different from any that had come before him, for he was believed to be universal, not merely Egyptian.

The universal claims for Aton led to religious intolerance of the worshippers of other gods. Their temples were closed and the name of Amon-Re was removed from all monuments. The old priests were deprived of their posts and privileges. The new religion was more remote than the old. Only the pharaoh and his family worshipped Aton directly and the people worshipped the pharaoh. Akhenaton's interest in religious reform proved disastrous in the long run. The Asian possessions fell away and the economy crumbled as a result. When the pharaoh died, a strong reaction swept away his life's work.

His chosen successor was put aside and replaced by [Tutankhamon](http://guardians.net/egypt/tut1.htm) (1347-1339 B.C.), the husband of one of the daughters of Akhenaton and his wife, Nefertiti. The new pharaoh restored the old religion and wiped out as much as he could of the memory of the worship of Aton. He restored Amon to the center of the Egyptian pantheon, abandoned El Amarna, and returned the capital to Thebes. His magnificent tomb remained intact until its discovery in 1922.

The end of the El Amarna age restored power to the priests of Amon and to the military officers. Horemhab, a general, restored order and recovered much of the lost empire. He referred to Akhenaton as "the criminal of Akheton" and erased his name from the records. Akhenaton's city and memory disappeared for over 3000 years to be rediscovered by accident about a century ago.

**Egyptian Religion**

Religion was integral to Egyptian life. [Religious beliefs](http://interoz.com/egypt/gods1.htm) formed the basis of Egyptian art, medicine, astronomy, literature and government. The great pyramids were burial tombs for the pharaohs who were revered as gods on earth. Magical utterances pervaded medical practices since disease was attributed to the gods. Astronomy evolved to determine the correct time to perform religious rites and sacrifices. The earliest examples of literature dealt almost entirely with religious themes. The pharaoh was a sacrosanct monarch who served as the intermediary between the gods and man. Justice too, was conceived in religious terms, something bestowed upon man by the creator-god. Finally, the Egyptians developed an ethical code which they believed the gods had approved.

J. A. Wilson once remarked that if one were to ask an ancient Egyptian whether the sky was supported by posts or held up by a god, the Egyptian would answer: "Yes, it is supported by posts or held up by a god -- or it rests on walls, or it is a cow, or it is a goddess whose arms and feet touch the earth" (*The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man*, 1943). The ancient Egyptian was ready to accept any and all gods and goddesses that seemed appropriate. For instance, if a new area was incorporated into the Egyptian state, its gods and goddesses would be added to the pantheon of those already worshipped.

From its earliest beginnings, Egyptian religious cults included animals. It is no accident that sheep, bulls, gazelles and cats have been found carefully buried and preserved in their own graves. As time passed, the figures of Egyptian gods became human (anthropomorphism) although they often retained the animal's head or body. [Osiris](http://touregypt.net/osiris.htm), the the Egyptian god who judged the dead, first emerged as a local deity of the Nile Delta in Lower Egypt. It was Osiris who taught the Egyptian agriculture. [Isis](http://touregypt.net/ISIS.HTM) was his wife, and animal-headed Seth, his brother and rival. Seth killed Osiris. Isis persuaded the gods to bring him back to life, but thereafter he ruled below. Osiris was identified with the life-giving, fertilizing power of the Nile, and Isis with with the fertile earth of Egypt. [Horus](http://touregypt.net/horus.htm), the god of the sky, defeated the evil Seth after a long struggle.

But Horus was only one kind of sky god. There was also Re, the sun god, later conjoined with Amen, and still later [Aten](http://touregypt.net/aten.htm). The moon god was the baboon-headed Thoth, who was the god of wisdom, magic and numbers. In the great temple cities such as Heliopolis ("city of the sun"), priests worked out and wrote down hierarchies of divinities. In the small communities of villages, all the forces of nature were deified and worshipped. One local god was part crocodile, part hippopotamus, and part lion.

Despite the ever-increasing number of deities which could be added to this hierarchy of deities, one thing is certain: Egyptian religion, unlike the religion of Mesopotamia, was centralized. In Sumer, the temple was the focus of political, economic and religious organization. Indeed, it was often difficult to know where one aspect began and another ended. By contrast, the function of an Egyptian temple was focused on religion.

We are certain that ancient Egyptians were preoccupied with life after death. They believed that after death each human being would appear before Osiris and recount all the evil that had been committed during one's earthly existence: "I have not done evil to men. I have not ill-treated animals," and so on. This was a negative confession and justification for admittance into the blessed afterlife. Osiris would then have the heart of the person weighed in order to determine the truth of their confession.

The Egyptians believed not only in body and soul, but in *ka*, the indestructible vital principle of each person, which left the body at death but which could also return at other times. This explains why the Egyptians mummified the dead: so that the *ka*, on its return, would find the body not decomposed. And this also explains why tombs were filled with wine, grain, weapons, sailing ships and so on -- *ka* would find everything it needed, otherwise it might come back to haunt the living.

**Ancient Egyptian Inventions**

The Egyptian’s inventions were many and it might be easier to list the things they did not invent such as the wheel; not unexpected in a country where everyone travels on water.

**The Pyramids**

The oldest pyramid was erected for King Zoser between 2667-2648 BC. In fact it is the first monumental stone building designed and constructed that we know of.

**Writing**

Along with the Mesopotamians, the Egyptians were the first people to develop their language into a codified form of writing. All early forms of writing were pictograms – pictures. All writing systems developed in this way but their original forms become lost as the pictures are refined into abstract forms. What is interesting about the Egyptians is that although their writing changed to the abstract form of Hieratic they deliberately preserved the hieroglyphic pictures in their original forms.

**Papyrus Sheets**

Papyrus sheets are the earliest paper-like material – all other civilisations used stone, clay tablets, animal hide, wood materials or wax as a writing surface. Papyrus was, for over 3000 years, the most important writing material in the ancient world. It was exported all around the Mediterranean and was widely used in the Roman Empire as well as the Byzantine Empire. Its use continued in Europe until the seventh century AD, when an embargo on exporting it forced the Europeans to use parchment.

**Black Ink**

The Egyptians mixed vegetable gum, soot and bee wax to make black ink. They replaced soot with other materials such as ochre to make various colours.

**The Ox-drawn Plough**

Using the power of oxen to pull the plough revolutionised agriculture and modified versions of this Egyptian invention are still used by farmers in developing countries around the world.

**The Sickle**

The sickle is a curved blade used for cutting and harvesting grain, such as wheat and barley.

**Irrigation**

The Egyptians constructed canals and irrigation ditches to harness Nile river’s yearly flood and bring water to distant fields.

**Shadoof**

The Shadoof is a long balancing pole with a weight on one end and a bucket on the other. The bucket is filled with water and easily raised then emptied onto higher ground.

**The Calendar**

The Egyptians devised the solar calendar by recording the yearly reappearance of Sirius (the Dog Star) in the eastern sky. It was a fixed point which coincided with the yearly flooding of the Nile. Their calendar had 365 days and 12 months with 30 days in each month and an additional five festival days at the end of the year. However, they did not account for the additional fraction of a day and their calendar gradually became incorrect. Eventually Ptolemy III added one day to the 365 days every four years.

**Clocks**

In order to tell the time Egyptians invented two types of clock.
Obelisks were used as sun clocks by noting how its shadow moved around its surface throughout the day. From the use of obelisks they identified the longest and shortest days of the year.
An inscription in the tomb of the court official Amenemhet dating to the16th century BC shows a water clock made from a stone vessel with a tiny hole at the bottom which allowed water to dripped at a constant rate. The passage of hours could be measured from marks spaced at different levels. The priest at Karnak temple used a similar instrument at night to determine the correct hour to perform religious rites.

**The Police**

During the Old and Middle Kingdoms order was kept by local officials with their own private police forces. During the New Kingdom a more centralized police force developed, made up primarily of Egypt’s Nubian allies, the Medjay. They were armed with staffs and used dogs. Neither rich nor poor citizens were above the law and punishments ranged from confiscation of property, beating and mutilation (including the cutting off of ears and noses) to death without a proper burial. The Egyptians believed that a proper burial was essential for entering the afterlife, so the threat of this last punishment was a real deterrent, and most crime was of a petty nature.

“They went to the granary, stole three great loaves and eight sabu-cakes of Rohusu berries. They drew a bottle of beer which was cooling in water, while I was staying in my father’s room. My Lord, let whatsoever has been stolen be given back to me.” (Eighteenth Dynasty)

**Surgical Instruments**

The Edwin Smith Papyrus shows the Egyptians invented medical surgery. It describes 48 surgical cases of injures of the head, neck, shoulders, breast and chest. It includes a list of instruments used during surgeries with instructions for the suturing of wounds using a needle and thread. This list includes lint, swabs, bandage, adhesive plaster, surgical stitches and cauterization. It is also the earliest document to make a study of the brain. The Cairo Museum has a collection of surgical instruments which include scalpels, scissors, copper needles, forceps, spoons, lancets, hooks, probes and pincers.

**Wigs**

During the hot summers many Egyptians shaved their heads to keep them clean and prevent pests such as lice. Although priests remained bald as part of their purification rituals, those that could afford it had wigs made in various styles and set with perfumed beeswax.

**Cosmetic Makeup**

The Egyptian invented eye makeup as far back as 4000 B.C. They combined soot with a lead mineral called galena to create a black ointment known as kohl. They also made green eye makeup by combining malachite with galena to tint the ointment.
Both men and women wore eye makup; believing it could cure eye diseases and keep them from falling victim to the evil eye.

**Toothpaste**

At the 2003 dental conference in Vienna, dentists sampled a replication of ancient Egyptian toothpaste. Its ingredients included powdered of ox hooves, ashes, burnt eggshells and pumice. Another toothpaste recipe and a how-to-brush guide was written on a papyrus from the fourth century AD describes how to mix precise amounts of rock salt, mint, dried iris flower and grains of pepper, to form a “powder for white and perfect teeth.”

**Mummification**

The Egyptians were so expert at preserving the bodies of the dead that after thousands of years we know of the diseases they suffered such as arthritis, tuberculosis of the bone, gout, tooth decay, bladder stones, and gallstones; there is evidence, too, of the disease bilharziasis (schistosomiasis), caused by small, parasitic flatworms, which still exists in Egypt today. There seems to have been no syphilis or rickets.