



MUSEO
EGIZIO

**STORIES OF WATER,
SOIL AND SAND**

Daily life in Egypt

ONLINE MEETING
VADEMECUM FOR THE TEACHER



DURING THE MEETING

The papyrus plant.....	p. 6
Focus.....	p. 7
The lotus flower.....	p. 8
Focus.....	p. 9
Focus.....	p. 10
Symbolic animals.....	p. 12
A very crowded map.....	p. 13
Dangerous animals and deities.....	p. 16
AKHET/PERET/SHEMU.....	p. 20
The colour expert.....	p. 24
Focus.....	p. 25

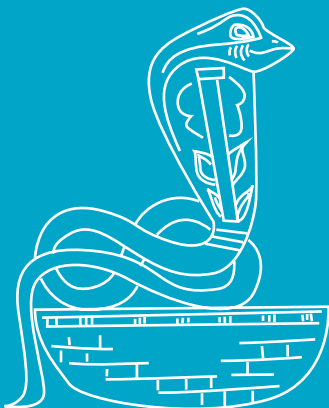
AFTER THE MEETING

Sesh qedut: the contour scribe.....	p. 28
Exercise.....	p. 29
Summary map of the topics covered during the meeting.....	p. 31

DURING

THE MEETING WITH THE EGYPTOLOGIST

FLORA AND FAUNA: FUNCTION AND SYMBOL



THE PAPYRUS PLANT

Plants and flowers were precious resources for the Egyptians.

Observing the flora to recognize the qualities and possible uses of the individual plants became an indispensable talent for each inhabitant of the Nile Valley.

In the Nile Delta (the area in which the river branches in many channels which flow into the Mediterranean sea), the territory is flat. In some places the land is below the sea level and there you can find areas with stagnant water, where the papyrus grows in abundance.

For this reason **the papyrus became a symbol of Lower Egypt.**

The **papyrus** is a herbaceous plant. The stem is triangular and the leaves, long and thin, are arranged as an umbrella at its top.

Egyptians learned to use every part of this plant:

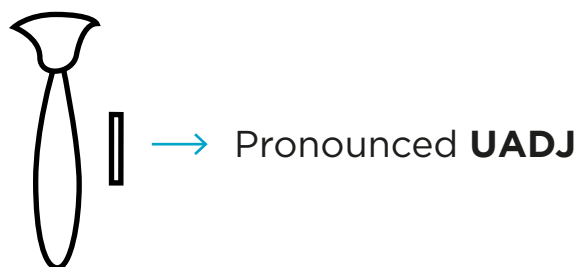


- The robust **stems**, once tied together, served to make light boats used to navigate along the shores of the Nile;
- From the **pith**, the inner part of the stem, the Egyptians obtained thin strips with which they produced very resistant sheets of paper used to write texts to be preserved for generations;
- The **leaves** were intertwined to produce ropes, sandals and baskets;
- Not even the **roots** were thrown away, for they could be chewed like we could do today with liquorice sticks.

In conclusion, of the papyrus nothing was discarded!

Curiosity

The word “papyrus” written with hieroglyphic signs:





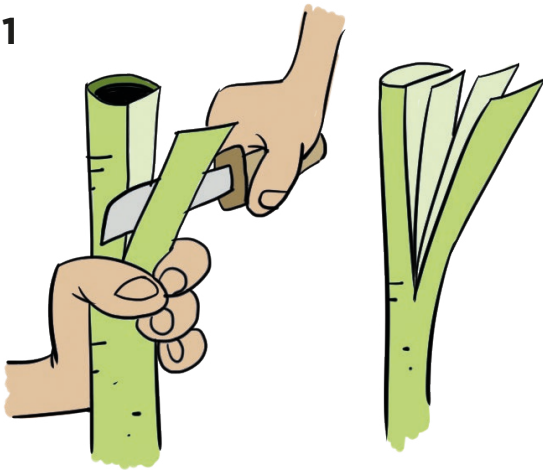
FOCUS: HOW DID THE EGYPTIANS PRODUCE A PAPYRUS SHEET OF PAPER?

To make a papyrus sheet of paper, the Egyptians removed the bark from the stem and used the **pith, which is the most tender part inside**.

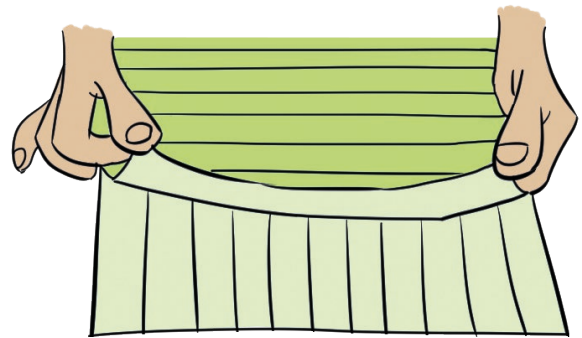
The pith was cut into thin strips, then softened in water. Taking advantage of the plant's sap – which works like a natural glue – the strips were **vertically aligned** to form a rectangular layer. They then proceeded applying on top of it **a second layer at a right angle**: in this way, one side had the fibres arranged vertically, and the other horizontally. The two layers were then hammered together or pressed between two stones and, finally, dried in the sun.

In this way the Egyptians obtained a durable sheet, the size of a page of a big exercise book!

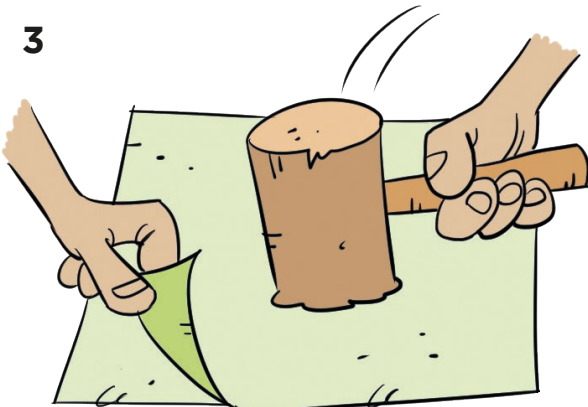
1



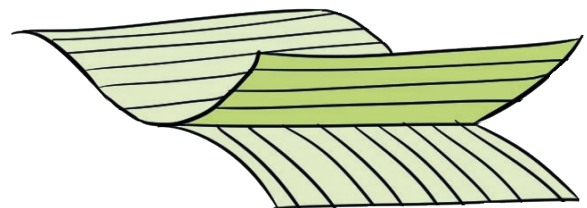
2



3



4



THE LOTUS FLOWER

The **lotus** is a **typical plant of the south**, and it represented **Upper Egypt**.

When the Nile, flowing through Africa, enters the south of the country, it meets a mountain area: this is why this part of the territory is called Upper Egypt! Gradually, flowing from south to north, the reliefs become less tall and more similar to hills, until finally the landscape turns into a plain.

The **lotus** is an aquatic plant, which belongs to the family of the water lilies and produces coloured flowers (white or blue).

Egyptians learned to exploit all its qualities:



- The **flowers** (open or in buds) were used as an ornament for wigs or intertwined in wearable garlands;
- The **seeds**, very similar to fava beans, were edible;
- The **roots** were used as a powerful narcotic.

Egyptians became expert lotus farmers, and with this plant they produced a precious fragrant oil: for this use they preferred the blue lotus, because it had a more intense fragrance.

Curiosity

The word “lotus” written with hieroglyphic signs:





FOCUS: THE LOTUS BETWEEN MYTH AND SYMBOL

The Egyptians handed down a very fascinating mythological tale: in a legendary time, before everything was created, a lotus flower emerged from the waters acting as a “cradle” for the rising sun!

(Image 1)



The Sun god is identifiable as a child by the bizarre detail of the finger brought to the mouth!

The lotus flower represents an improvised, but very effective cradle.

Image 1 - The Sun rising on the lotus flower



The lotus flower, which opens in the morning and closes at sunset, is a good representation of the cyclic nature of life. For this reason, the Egyptians usually depicted their dead with a lotus flower kept near their nostrils: breathing its intense scent means “aspiring” to the rebirth and eternal life! (Image 2)

Decorative pattern with lotus flower petals

Open lotus flower



Garland with lotus flowers

Lotus flower bud

Image 2 - The two deceased, Kha and Merit, hold an open lotus and a bud in their hands!



FOCUS: THE SEMA-TAUI

The papyrus and the lotus are intertwined creating the symbol of the union of the two parts of Egypt: the **sema-taui** (**image 3**).

Looking at it in detail, you see how the papyrus and lotus stems are tied in a knot around the design of the trachea, an organ that leads the air to the lungs, the strange double bag at the base!

To learn about the shape of the trachea and the lungs, look at **image 4** and then observe how the two parts of the human body are depicted in the **sema-taui**.

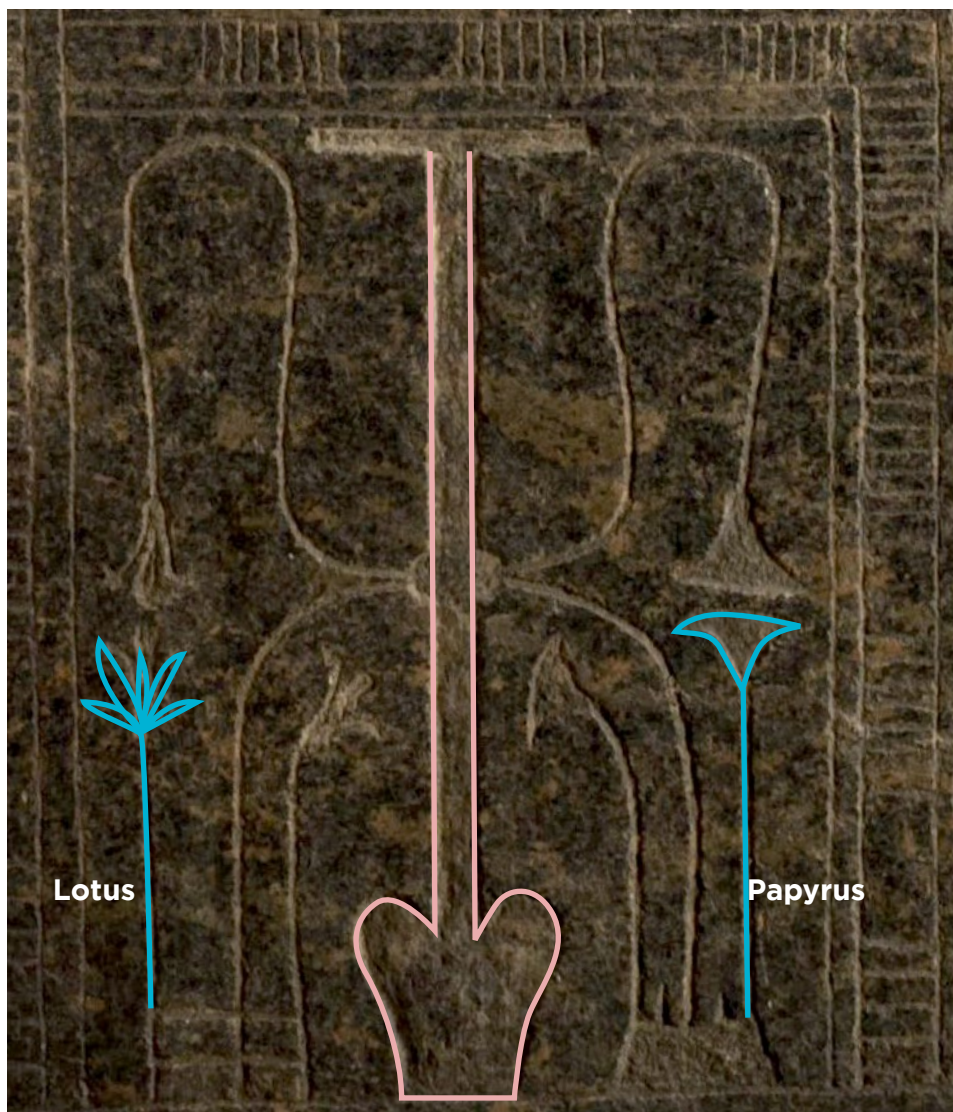


Image 3

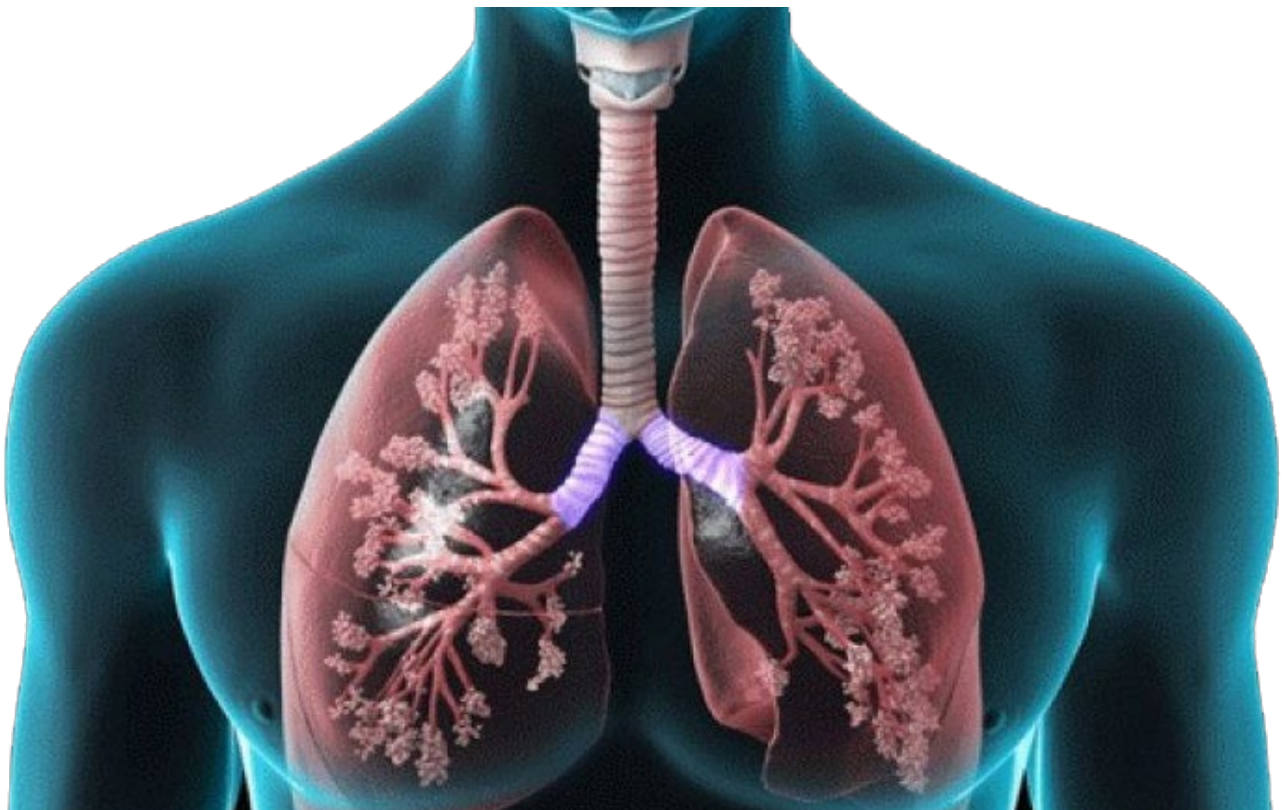


Image 4

This is the meaning of the mysterious symbol that you can find on the sides of the throne of pharaohs and gods in the galleries of the museum.

This detail usually goes unnoticed!



The sema-tau hidden in the Book of the Dead of Kha.

SYMBOLIC ANIMALS

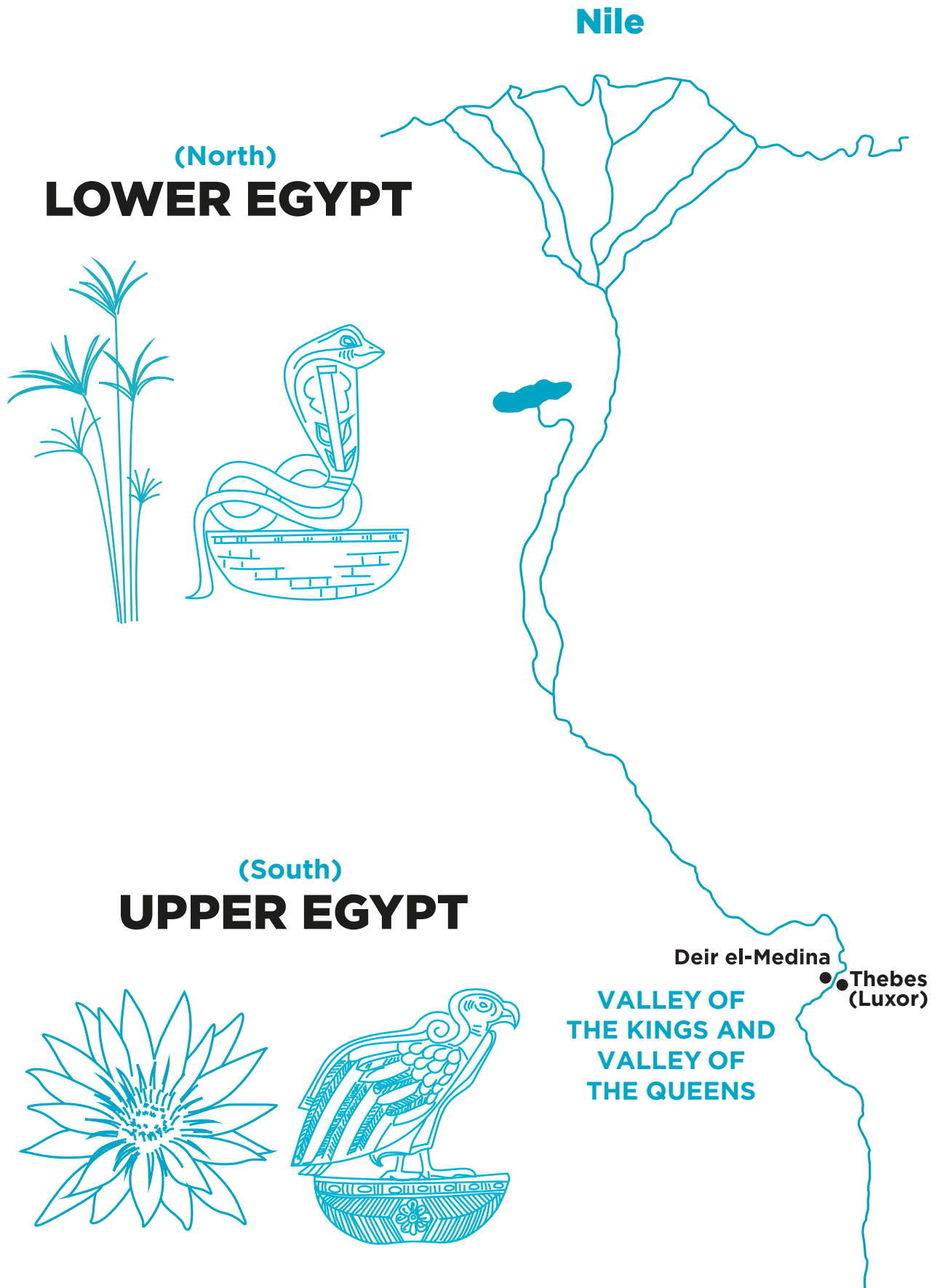
The two parts of Egypt, **Lower** (north) and **Upper** (south), are also associated with two particular animals:

- **the king cobra** was the sacred animal of the **goddess Uadjet**; the Egyptians considered her the protector of the pharaoh who reigns in Lower Egypt (north).
- **the vulture** was the sacred animal of the **goddess Nekhbet**; in this case, the Egyptians believed that she was the guardian of the king that rules Upper Egypt (**image 5**).



Image 5 - The goddesses Uadjet and Nekhbet

A VERY CROWDED MAP





DURING

THE MEETING WITH THE EGYPTOLOGIST

DANGEROUS ANIMALS AND DEITIES



DANGEROUS ANIMALS AND DEITIES

The Egyptians who lived along the shores of the Nile were forced since the most ancient times to deal with lions, crocodiles and snakes; these are just some of the most fierce beasts with which they learned to coexist through experiences not always so positive. They transformed the most dangerous creatures into “adorable” animals with a brilliant strategy: they considered them as the earthly manifestations of specific deities that they had to worship to prevent their attacks!

Here are some of the **deities** that were better to know and to “**please**”:



Sekhmet

Goddess with a human body and a lion's head complete with a mane; her name means “the powerful” and, not surprisingly, for the Egyptians she was the goddess of war, drought, famine and disease; they were praying and respecting her to avoid these dangers and to transform the goddess into a powerful healer and protector. In her docile form, Sekhmet becomes the gentle goddess Bastet, changing her nature from a roaring lion to a cuddly cat! (image p. 14)



Sobek

God with a human body and crocodile head; he was considered the lord of the waters and the god that favoured fertility. By observing the behaviour of this animal, the Egyptians understood that his sighting announced the arrival of the flood of the Nile that would fertilise the land and guarantee food in abundance for everyone.



Apopi

God in the form of a terrible snake, which embodied evil and injustice. For the Egyptians he was the enemy of the sun, attacking it every night to prevent it from rising at dawn; due to their clash, the morning sky is red, proof of a no holds barred fight. Fortunately the sun is wounded but not killed and thus, every day, it shines in the sky guaranteeing the survival on Earth!



DURING

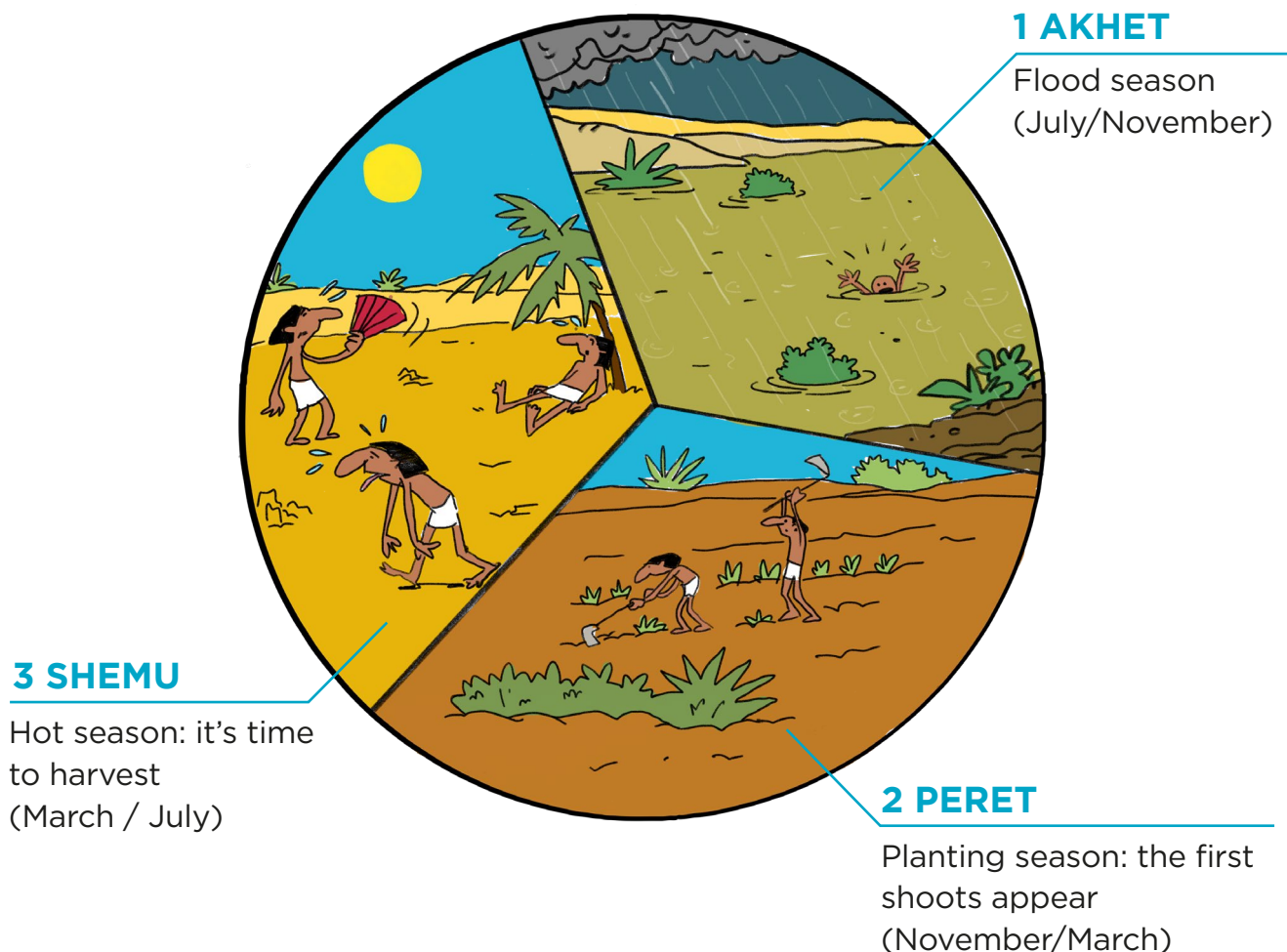
THE MEETING WITH THE EGYPTOLOGIST

THE SEASONS AND THE CYCLE OF THE NILE



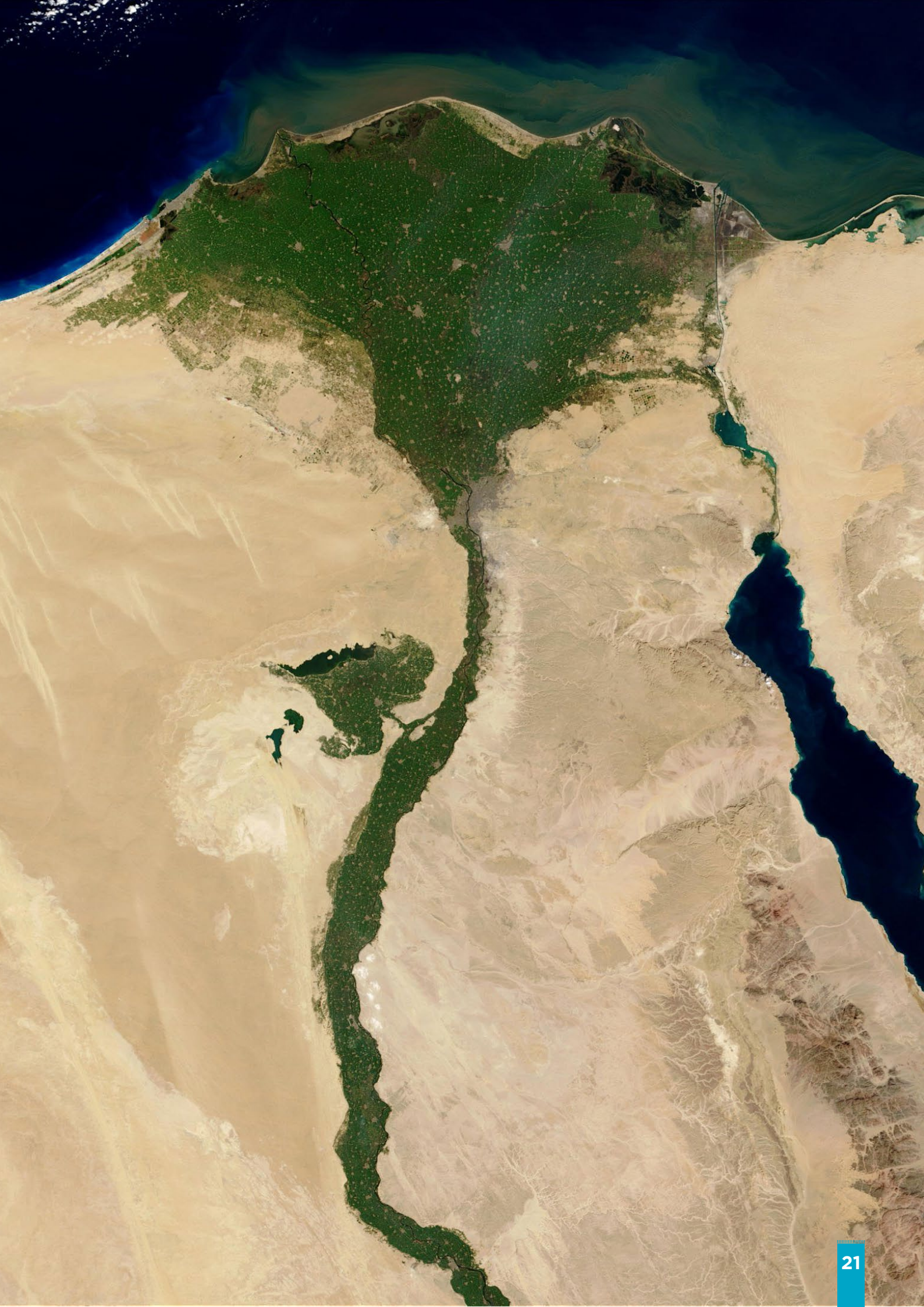
AKHET/PERET/SHEMU

At the time of the pharaohs, the Nile followed a particular cycle of life: the abundant seasonal rains in central Africa were inflating its numerous tributaries, pouring an immense amount of water to the north. This phenomenon was the cause of the famous floods of the Nile; the Egyptians learned to control the destructive force of its waters, channelling them and taking advantage of the “fertilizer” power of the silt.



And today? After the construction of the Aswan dam, begun in 1960, the devastating force of the Nile was finally contained. Since then the precious silt deposited by the waters of the river has become a distant memory. The villages and the cities are now safe, but unfortunately chemical fertilizers are used to cultivate the land.

Note: illustration of © Franco Cosimo Panini Editore

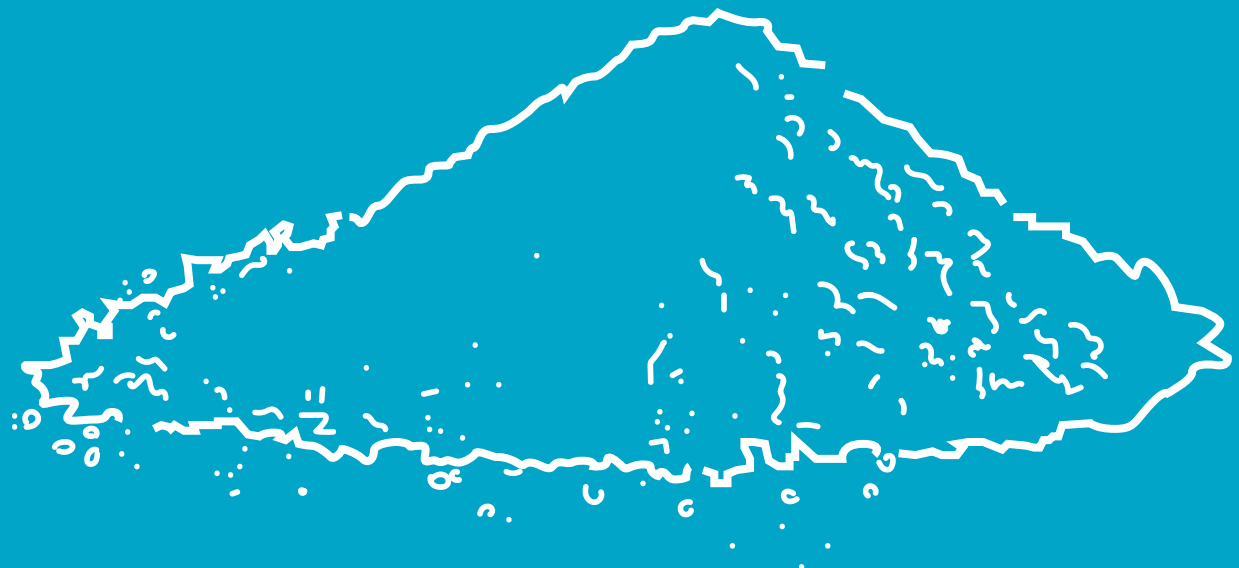




DURING

THE MEETING WITH THE EGYPTOLOGIST

COLOURS OF EGYPT



THE COLOUR EXPERT

The artists of the village of Deir el-Medina were serious professionals, paid for their work!

The salary was not made up of money, but of basic commodities: the pharaoh, for which they worked, rewarded them with meat, fish, fresh vegetables, linen fabrics and ointments for the care and protection of the body! Not rarely, along with these goods, materials and tools needed for work were also distributed.

For example, the painters received the raw materials used to make the colours, because the Egyptians didn't have a paint shop where to buy them!

The colour expert was then free to produce his best recipe of blue, red or green, mixing the ingredients together according to secret proportions that he was unwilling to reveal to anyone.

At this point he only needed to transfer the coloured mixture in the proper holes of his palette, which also worked as a "case" for his brushes.



Image 6 - Painter's palette



FOCUS: WHAT INGREDIENTS THE EGYPTIANS USED FOR THEIR COLOURS?



BLACK: made with charcoal powder or of a mineral called “manganese”.



RED: obtained from the red ochre of the desert or from iron rust (the typical red dust produced by iron when it “rusts”).



GREEN: obtained from the copper bronze “rust” (just like that of the iron, but it’s green instead of red!).



YELLOW: obtained from the yellow ochre of the desert or from the “orpiment”, a poisonous mineral.



BLUE: since in nature a “substance” of this colour is quite rare, the Egyptians produced it by mixing sand, copper and natron.

Once the colours were produced following their recipe, each coloured powder was mixed with water and the mixture obtained was put to dry in a tray, ready to use exactly like a watercolour set!

Curiosity

Natron is a special salt that forms in salted lakes in the Nile Delta. Natron was also one of the fundamental ingredients in the embalming process, used to dry and reduce the body of the deceased to “skin and bones”!



AFTER

THE MEETING WITH THE EGYPTOLOGIST

DRAWING EXERCISE



SESH QEDUT: THE CONTOUR SCRIBE

The Egyptian expression sesh qedut means “contour scribe” and was used to indicate a professional able to draw animals, people and everything he had learned to observe in everyday life!

To practice his art, he used a grid-system, as can be seen from some objects exhibited in the museum:



The “models” of animals of this fragment of papyrus could be used, starting from the right proportions, to reproduce them in various sizes. To achieve a similar result, the sesh qedut learned to draw each figure within a grid-system: in this way, he could reproduce the drawing in any available space, from the smallest to the largest, respecting the same proportions.

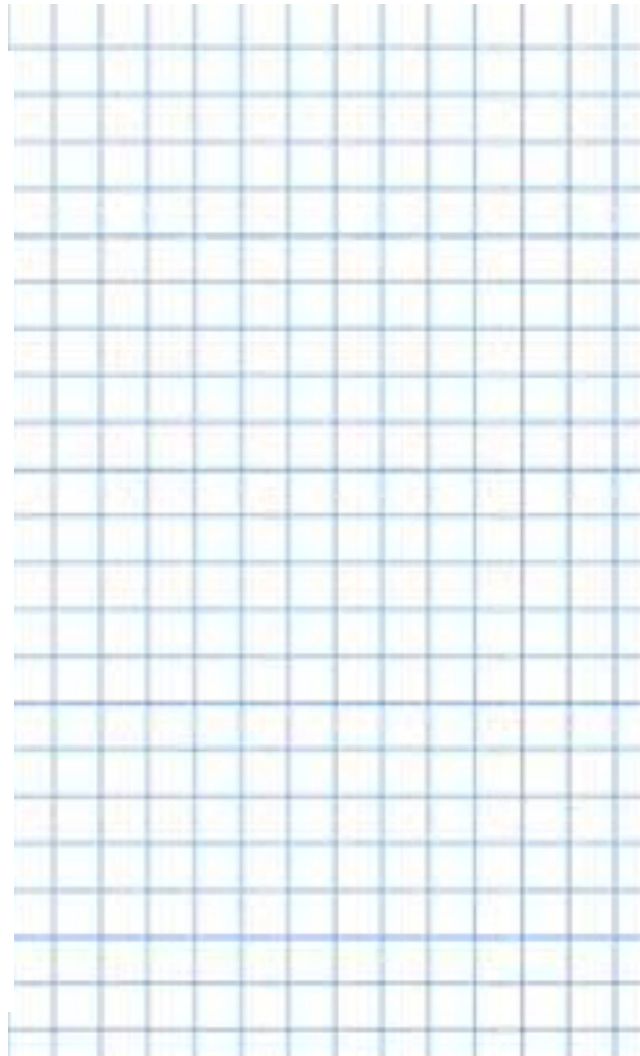


EXERCISE: TEST YOURSELF!

Also today the use of a grid-system is a good exercise: try to draw the image of the man in the example, counting exactly how many squares are occupied by each part of the body:



18
17
16
15
14
13
12
11
10
9
8
7
6
5
4
3
2
1
0



18
17
16
15
14
13
12
11
10
9
8
7
6
5
4
3
2
1
0



SUMMARY MAP OF THE TOPICS COVERED DURING THE MEETING

