The Environment of the Nile Valley & Surrounding Area
Egypt is characterized by a hot, almost rainless climate.

The annual rainfall for the entire country is 10 mm.

Even along the Mediterranean - where you would expect much more precipitation - rainfall is less than 200 mm.
The Greek historian Herodotus said that Egypt was the gift of the Nile. The Nile river was the most dominant geographic feature influencing the daily life of the ancient Egyptians.
When Egyptians traveled to other lands, they noticed that the Rivers ran the “wrong” way.

A text of Thutmose I (16th Century BC) describe the Euphrates as “the inverted water that goes downstream in going upstream.”
The Nile’s northward flow is also important because its the basis for modern geographic terminology:

- Southern Egypt is referred to as Upper Egypt,
- The delta, or northern Egypt, is known as Lower Egypt.
During ancient times, Egypt was divided into four main geographic areas formed by the imaginary intersection of the river and the east west passage of the sun.

The river flowed from the valley to the delta, and the sun rose over the eastern desert and set behind the western desert.
The Nile Delta

The delta, representing 63 percent of the inhabited area of Egypt, extends approximately 200 km from south to north, and 400 km from east to west.
Today the Nile flows through the delta via two principal branches, the Rosetta and the Damietta.

In antiquity there were three principal channels, known in Pharonic times as:

- The Water of Pre
- The Water of Ptah
- The Water of Amun
The coast of the delta it is a marshy area, called the Bareri, interspersed with lagoons and lakes.

There are 4 major lakes in the Delta

The northern shores of these lakes are separated from the sea by strips of sand forming street, regular borders, but the southern shores are irregular and often grade into marshes and swamps.
The most dominant topographic feature in the Delta are Geziras - deposits of sand, sandy clay that rise from 1 to 12 meters above the surrounding area.

the Geziras follow a northeast-southwest direction and divides the Delta into two parts
Along most of its course through Egypt, the Nile has scoured a deep, wide gorge in the desert plateau and deposited a thick layer of rich, dark silt on the Valley floor.

For 965 km between Cairo and Aswan, the Nile follows a generally south-north course that drops only 71 meters below sea level.
Red Land/Black Land

In antiquity, the Nile Valley was called **Kemet**, which means “Black Land,” in reference to the rich agricultural plain.

The arid east and deserts outside the valley were collectively referred to as **Djoseret**, which means “Red Land.”

This dichotomy between Red Land and Black Land play a very important role in the history of ancient Egypt.
The Annual Inundation

The special character of the Nile, which made it so central to Egyptian culture, was its annual inundation.
During June, the Nile began to rise between Cairo and Aswan.

During August, its waters took on a muddy red color due to the presence of rich red earth brought into the Nile by the **Blue Nile** and the **Atbara**.

The river continued to rise until mid-September - it began to descend around December.

As it receded, it deposited a thick bed of very nutrient rich silt and mud, which was extremely fertile and made for excellent agriculture.
The Egyptians understood the extent their lives and prosperity depended on the regularity of the inundation.

Excessive floods were also a source of fear.

Long periods of flooding reduced crop yields by favoring plant parasites and delaying the harvest until April, when the hot winds (referred to by Egyptians khamsin) would parch the crop.
- Low floods would have resulted in the floodplain remaining dry and devoid of fertile sediment.

- This kind of failure would lead to starvation, livestock destruction, seed stocks would be placed under severe pressure, and marginal lands would have to be abandoned.

- It is hardly an exaggeration to say that total economic disruption and total depopulation would be inevitable.
Beyond its life bringing character, the Nile was also the principal corridor of transportation that ran through the country.

Because most villages were situated near the Nile. There was little incentive to develop complex land transport infrastructure (like roads).
A boat traveling south against the current could use sails, while one traveling north could easily paddle with the current.

Travel by means of the river was so common that the hieroglyph for the word “go north” was a boat without a sail, while the hieroglyph for the word “go south” was a boat with a sail.
Understanding Egyptian Chronology
The ancient Egyptians employed two calendars: one civil and one religious.

Each divided the year into 12 thirty-day months.

Each 12-month year was grouped into three 4-month agricultural seasons: the inundation (akhet), the growing period (peret), and the harvest period (shemu).

Each month was divided into 3 10-day periods.
• fixed seasonal or solar events gradually moved forward in the calendar, and away from the month in which they were originally associated.

• This problem was solved by adding intervals at the end of every calendar year – an idea not unlike our own leap year.

• The civil calendar was followed by a 5 day period, while a thirteenth month was inserted into the religious calendar every 2 or 3 years to compensate of the gradual dislocation of the actual seasons from their calendar designations.
Historical Texts

- the Egyptian did not leave many comprehensive historical documents.

- Much is reconstructed from the annals of individual reigns, autobiographical texts, historical sources from outside Egypt, and archaeological excavations.
The most important of these documents are the 4 existing extensive king lists:

- The Turin Papyrus
- The Palermo Stone
- The Tenroy list at Saqqara
- The Seti I king list at Abydos.
The earliest attempt to compile a comprehensive history of Egypt was undertaken by an Egyptian priest who lived during the 3rd century BC.

He divided the history of ancient Egypt into a series of 31 (or sometimes 32) dynasties.
Turin Papyrus
Palermo Stone

- Contains records of the kings of Egypt from the first dynasty through the fifth dynasty.

- The text begins by listing several thousands of years of rulers — presumed by many to be mythical — predating the rise of the god Horus.
Tenroy/Saqqarra King List

- The inscription lists 58 kings from 1st dynasty to 19th dynasty in reverse chronological order.

- Omitting rulers from the Second Intermediate Period, the Hyksos & those rulers who had been close to the heretic Akhenaten.
The Seti I king list at Abydos

- list of the names of seventy-six pharaohs
- Temple of Seti I at Abydos
- This list omits the names of many pharaohs who were 'erased' from this revised history
- **Early Dynastic Period** (Archaic)
  1st-2nd Dynasty - 3050-2695 BC

- **Old Kingdom**
  3rd-8th Dynasties - 2695-2160 BC

- **First Intermediate Period**
  9th-11th Dynasties - 2160-1991 BC

- **Middle Kingdom**
  12th Dynasty - 1991-1785 BC

- **Second Intermediate Period**
  13th-17th Dynasties - 1785-1540 BC

- **New Kingdom**
  18th-20th Dynasties - 1540-1070 BC

- **Third Intermediate Period**
  21st-24th Dynasties - 1070-712 BC

- **Late Period (Kushite/Saite)**
  25th-31st Dynasties - 712-332 BC