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ANCIENT EGYPT

AND HER NEIGHBORS



BY LORENE LAMBERT

Make the ancient world come alive!

"Thousands of years ago in northern Africa, people lived in little villages scattered along the banks of a mighty river. On either side, beyond the river's reach, golden desert sands stretched to the farthest horizon; but the river provided a thin ribbon of green land, and on this land the people grew their crops and built their homes."

Thus begins the fascinating story of Ancient Egypt—a story intertwined with the other civilizations that existed alongside her in the ancient world.

With this captivating narrative, you will explore all that made Egypt famous: her powerful pharaohs; the mystery of her hieroglyphs; her unique art, pervading religion, and towering pyramids.

But you will also discover the stories of her neighbors, far and near, as you read about

- why a tiny carved cylinder was so important to Ancient Sumerians,
- the puzzle of a vanished people in the Indus Valley whose writing we still cannot decipher,
- how a stone finger pointing to the sky in Ancient Babylon influenced our system of justice today,
- why writing on turtle shells assured a lasting dynasty in Ancient China,
- which charging bull the Ancient Minoans could not leap over,
- the secrets of a chalk horse and giant stones in Ancient Britain,
- plus, many other neighbors' stories.

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Ancient Egypt and Her Neighbors

by Lorene Lambert

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Chapter One

The Black Land and the Red

The Geography of Ancient Egypt

Thousands of years ago in northern Africa, people lived in little villages scattered along the banks of a mighty river. On either side, beyond the river's reach, golden desert sands stretched to the farthest horizon; but the river provided a thin ribbon of green land, and on this land the people grew their crops and built their homes. Each summer as the sun climbed higher in the sky and the dry winds withered the grasses farther from the water's edge, the people began to look to the east. They were searching for a star.

Early one morning in late summer, a brilliant star would appear, low in the eastern sky. Today we call this star Sirius, the Dog Star, the brightest star in the heavens. But the people along the river knew it as Sopdet (sahp-DET), which meant "sharp" or "bright." In their artwork, the people pictured Sopdet as a beautiful goddess in a red dress with a five-pointed star upon her head. They rejoiced when they saw Sopdet in the sky, for the appearance of the star meant that a new year had begun. These people divided their year into three seasons, and the first was Akhet (awk-HET), the Season of the Flood. The birth of the new year meant that their river was about to change.

Every year, like clockwork, just after Sopdet's first rising in the east, the usually peaceful river would start to roar, rising up to more than twice its usual height. The marshy banks could not contain the heaving waters, and they would flood over the nearby ground until the river was, in some places, as much as a mile wide. Rolling, muddy water covered the flat plains.

The Season of the Flood lasted for four months. The crest of high waters would gradually make its way along the river's course until the flood emptied into the Mediterranean Sea to the north and the river water ebbed back into its usual placid flow. It would leave behind tons of thick, rich black mud, which nowadays we call silt. Then would begin the second season of the year, Peret (Peh-RET), the Season of Emerging. The farmers would watch eagerly as the new soil emerged from the receding waters. They had spent most of the previous month readying their tools, and now they could begin to work their fields, plowing the loose black dirt, planting the seeds carefully saved from the last year's harvest, and tending the tender new plants as they sprang up out of the ground.

Four months of planting and weeding and caring for the fields led to the third and final season of the year, the Season of the Harvest, Shemu (SHEM-oo). Now the people could gather and store the crops they had grown: wheat and barley, lentils and chickpeas. They could celebrate another year of life and prosperity alongside their river. The river's bountiful black silt sustained the people year by year, and they knew well how valuable a gift the river bestowed on them. The rich soil was so important, in fact, that the people used it to name their land. They called their country Kemet (keh-MET), the Black Land, and their river, Ar, which means black.

Have you guessed the identity of Kemet? I suspect that you have! Today we call this land Egypt, and its river, the mighty Nile. If I ask you to picture Egypt in your mind, I will venture to guess that you are thinking about pyramids

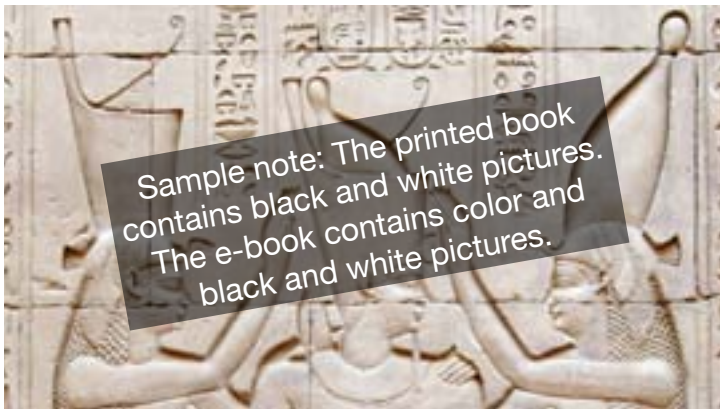
and mummies, golden masks and mysterious hieroglyphic writing. But before all of those things came to be, Egypt was a land of villages, strung along the river like beads on a wide green ribbon, waiting for the annual appearance of the star Sopdet.

The life-giving Nile is the longest river in the world. It arises in the blue waters of Lake Victoria, far to the south in the modern-day countries of Uganda and Rwanda. From there it meanders northward until it is joined by another river, the Blue Nile, near the great city of Khartoum in the nation of Sudan. Much larger now, it flows ever northward, through six great cataracts, which is a word for whitewater rapids—places where the water is broken by many boulders and stones and tiny islands, so that it curls and foams. After its wild and rushing passage through the cataracts, the Nile calms itself and flows smoothly onward through the land of Egypt until it reaches the low lands bordering the Mediterranean Sea. There it begins to divide and braid, spreading out into many streams that together form a great delta, a triangular shaped mass of green reeds and water channels, through which the river eventually drains into the Sea. If you will look at a map of Egypt, you will see the Nile Delta at its northern edge, shaped very much like a lotus flower, with the verdant banks of the flowing river stretching south like a graceful stem.

There were perhaps a million people living in the little villages, at the dawn of Egypt's history. They nestled close to the river, the source of life. Beyond its reach, the Sahara desert was ever present, thousands of miles of arid sand. The Egyptians, the people of the Black Land, called the desert Deshret (DESH-ret), the Red Land; and they feared its power. It was the dead land, the barren land, and only the power of the river kept it at bay. If the river were ever to fail, the dry red desert would creep in and cover their villages and fields with endless drifting sand.

For all of its fearsomeness, the desert was also a blessing to these most ancient of Egyptians. It made Egypt into a natural fortress. Along the banks of the Nile, there was perhaps a mile or two of farmland and then, the desert. To the west, the desolate Sahara sands stretched for more than one thousand miles. To the east, the parched Sinai Peninsula spread out in miles and miles of lifeless, broken rocks. With the deep Mediterranean Sea as their northern border and the Nile's impassable cataracts and canyons to the south, the ancient Egyptians were protected from hostile neighbors or invading forces. Since the river provided them with safety, ample water, and the annual gift of black silt, the people in the villages could live a life of quiet contentment.

They were not necessarily peaceful, though. They certainly had everything they needed to be a strong nation. They all spoke the same language, they worshiped the same gods, they lived the same sorts of lives, following the rhythm of the river's three seasons. But they did not possess a single government. Over time they had arranged themselves into two groups: one centered in the North, around the Nile Delta, and one in the Nile Valley to the south. Because the river flows from south to north, the Delta region is called Lower Egypt



Sample note: The printed book contains black and white pictures. The e-book contains color and black and white pictures.

The red crown, double crown, and white crown

and the river valley to the south is called Upper Egypt.

The people of Lower Egypt made their capital in the city of Memphis, and their leader wore a red crown with a tall back sloping toward the front, where the figure of an upright cobra reared its head, ready to strike. Upper Egypt made its capital in a city that they called Nekhen (neh-KEN), and its leader wore a tall, cone-shaped white crown. Upper and Lower Egypt were often at war. Many lives were lost as the people battled each other for control over the river. They had no single ruler who could unite them into one nation. That feat was accomplished, finally, by a great man, who came to be honored throughout all of Egypt's history for his achievement in creating one country, one nation. The knowledge of this man and what he did would have been lost forever, though, if it were not for a single discovery made by a team of archaeologists digging in Egypt in the year 1898.

Do you know what an archaeologist does? He is a scientist who tries to figure out what life was like in the ancient past by digging up the past's remains, things like pots and scrolls and sometimes even bones. By studying these things, he hopes to determine something about how the people in the past lived and died, what they believed and what they cared about. He is like a detective, who must dig up his own clues out of the ground and try to assemble them so that they tell a story.

These particular archaeologists in 1898 were from Great Britain, and their names were James Quibell and Frederick Green. They were digging in the ruins of a great temple in the ancient city of Nekhen, the old capital of Upper Egypt. Among a group of sacred relics buried within the temple they found a most unusual item: a palette, formed from a smooth, heavy gray stone. A palette is a shield-shaped object upon which the ancient Egyptians would grind a green stone called malachite into a fine powder. They would then mix it with fat and make a smooth green paste with which to adorn their eyelids. Most

palettes were six or seven inches long, but this one was much larger—more than two feet long—and completely covered with elaborate carvings. The archaeologists surmised that such a large and elaborate palette could not have been used in someone’s home; it must have been a ceremonial object, used in a temple for some sort of service to the gods. As they studied it more closely, and as other scholars have studied it over the years, they realized that in carvings and picture-writing it told



Narmer Palette

a great story: the tale of the unification of Egypt.

On one side, the palette shows a large figure of a man, holding an enemy by his hair with his other arm raised high to strike. Picture-writing nearby tells the man’s name: Narmer (NAR-muhr). The other side of the palette shows Narmer again, leading a procession of tiny figures carrying banners of celebration, with each banner symbolizing a city in Upper Egypt. Most importantly, Narmer wears, on one side of the palette, the tall conical White Crown of Upper Egypt, but on the other he wears the Red Crown of Lower Egypt. The pictures show that Narmer, in leadership over a group of

southern communities, had led a conquest over the people of the delta, giving him the right to wear both crowns. Narmer was the first ruler to unite both Upper and Lower into one nation. For the next 3,000 years, Egypt would remain one, but they never forgot their divided past. They always referred to their country as The Two Lands, and their king as the “Lord of Upper and Lower Egypt.”

Narmer established his capital at the city of Memphis in Lower Egypt, and that city remained a center of power for most of Egypt’s history. There he established a dynasty, a ruling family. When Narmer died, his son donned the Double Crown and ruled the Two Lands in his stead; and when he died, he passed the kingdom on to his son in turn. Narmer’s family was the First Dynasty. Eventually, over the course of thousands of years, thirty-one dynasties would rule the Black Land, until at last Egyptian strength faded, overwhelmed by the mighty empire of Rome.

So as you think about Egypt, while you read the chapters to come, you must imagine it as it was and still is: a nation of people stretched out along the green Nile, a blooming lotus flower of a nation, arching gracefully atop the deserts of Africa.

Chapter Two

Land Between the Rivers

The Sumerians

Can you find the Nile River on a map of the world? You will see it blooming like a lotus flower as it empties into the broad blue expanse of the Mediterranean Sea. Now look to the northeast. Do you see two more rivers, stretching from below the Black Sea all the way south to the Persian Gulf? These are the Tigris and the Euphrates, and they are just as important in ancient history as the mighty Nile.

You can take your finger and trace an arc, starting at the Persian Gulf and arching upward along the course of the rivers, then down along the straight coastline of the Mediterranean and through the long green valley of the Nile. The whole region that your finger traveled is called the Fertile Crescent. Can you guess why? It is crescent-shaped, of course, just like a young moon; and it is fertile because the rivers nourished the people who lived there, providing water and thick, rich soil for their crops.

During the days when the people of the Black Land were organizing themselves into Upper and Lower Egypt and then uniting into one nation under Narmer's leadership, another group of people were settling and building along the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates. This land was called

Mesopotamia, which means “land between the rivers.” Like the Egyptians, the Mesopotamians depended completely on their rivers to survive. The Tigris and Euphrates did not flood with the clockwork regularity of the Nile, but heavy rains in the winter often brought floods, so that the fields were blessed with new silt almost every year. As the people began to settle into villages along the rivers, they dug irrigation channels, or trenches—long ditches that sucked water out of the flowing rivers and ran it out into the fields so that the farmers could grow wheat and barley, onions and garlic and peas, lettuce and cucumbers.

The first cities began to appear in the south, along the rivers, in a dry, flat plain that came to be called Sumer. Just like the early Egyptians, the Sumerians were not one unified nation. Instead, each city was its own independent kingdom, with the city at the center, and farmland and villages clustered around it. Each city was governed by a group of its most important citizens, who met together regularly to discuss the city’s problems and settle disputes among the people, and also to choose the city’s leader. This man was called the lugal (LOO-guhl), which means “the big man.” These lugals were the first kings in Mesopotamia. Concerned as they were with their own power, and with increasing that power by battling with the cities around them, they did not realize the advantage of uniting together into one strong nation. This blindness would lead to their downfall. Because just like Upper and Lower Egypt needed Narmer to weld them together, the cities of Sumer needed one man to make them into an empire.

This is how it happened.

The large Sumerian city of Kish was ruled in those days by a man named Ur-Zubaba (ER zoo-BAH-bah). Like most ancient kings, he had a cupbearer—a man whose duty it was to serve drinks at the royal table. This sounds like a very humble position, but actually the cupbearer was a person of

high rank in the court, because he must be a man whom the king could trust completely. He must guard against poison in the king's cup. Sometimes he was even required to sip from the cup before the king did, in order to test that the drink was safe.

Ur-Zubaba's cupbearer was a young man named Sargon (SEHR-gohn). He had come to the king's court from the northern part of Mesopotamia, a region called Akkad (AK-ad), saying only that he was the adopted son of a gardener and did not know the name of his true father. One night, after he had been serving the king for only a short time, Sargon had a dream. In it, he saw himself blessed by the Sumerian goddess Inanna; he also saw the goddess rejecting the king. When Ur-Zubaba heard about this dream, he was very frightened. He summoned Sargon, handed him a carefully sealed clay tablet, and commanded him to deliver it to the king of the city of Uruk (OO-rook). Sargon obediently set forth, unaware that the tablet contained a request from Ur-Zubaba that the king of Uruk slay the one who brought him the message. Unfortunately for Ur-Zubaba's wicked plan, the king of Uruk refused to do such a thing, and Sargon returned to Kish unharmed, much to the king's dismay.

Shortly after, the city of Kish was attacked by a neighboring king. His army was large and threatening, and Ur-Zubaba fled the city. With no one else providing leadership, Sargon gathered the army of Kish around himself and went out to do battle with the attackers. Sargon was victorious, and when he returned, he named himself king of Kish. Ur-Zubaba was never heard from again.

After that, Sargon was unstoppable. He marched south; each of the cities on the plain of Sumer tried to rise up and meet him, but one by one they failed. He conquered each city in turn, until he was lord of all Sumer and the entire plain was his. By this point, he had come all the way south to the

Persian Gulf. So, his legends tell us, he waded into the quiet surf and washed his weapons in the saltwater, as a symbol to all the Sumerians that he had defeated them. Then he built himself a fabulous new capital city, not far from Kish, and named it Agade (ah-gah-DAY). In order to prevent any of the conquered cities from rising up in rebellion against him, he kept his army close. An inscription on a clay tablet boasted that “5,400 warriors ate bread daily before him.”

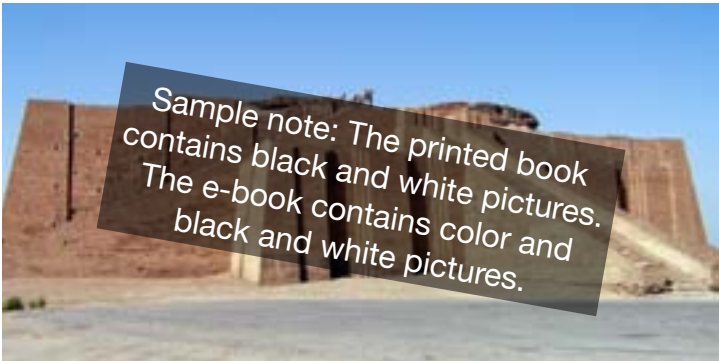
Sargon was not content to remain in Agade, feasting and lounging about. Because the land of the Sumerians had very few natural resources—no metal, no wood, no rock—Sargon knew that they must rely on trade with their neighbors to obtain those things, and he did not like being at the mercy of foreigners. So he marched his army north and west, along the arch of the Fertile Crescent, conquering all the cities and bringing them under his own control. In this way, he assured that his Sumerian empire would always be well-supplied with the goods his people needed and would always receive the very best prices from the foreign merchants!

Sargon reigned over his empire for 56 years, and under his rule Sumer became wealthy and powerful. Many years later the scribes of Babylon described Sargon this way:

Sargon had neither rival nor equal. His splendor, over the lands it spread. He crossed the sea in the east. He conquered the western land to its farthest point. He brought it under one authority. He set up his statues there.

Suppose you could whisk back in time and visit the city of Ur, Sumer’s greatest city. Your time machine might deposit you in the very center of the city, and there, towering over you, is a ziggurat—a huge structure with several levels and staircases zigzagging their way to the top. The ziggurat is a temple, built tall and massive because the Sumerians believed

they must climb closer to the sky in order to worship their gods. The temple was always built in the exact center of a Sumerian city. The Sumerians worshiped thousands of different gods, but each city would have one god that it especially honored. Here in Ur, this great ziggurat honors Nannu (NAH-noo), the god of the moon. Surrounding the temple are many buildings dedicated to serving the temple: workshops full of craftsmen, storerooms to hold the food and wine that would be brought into the city from the temple's farms and orchards outside the city walls, apartments and living quarters for all the temple priests, treasuries to safeguard the temple's riches, orphanages for children who are in the temple's care.



Ziggurat at Ur

The Sumerians believed that their gods were, in many ways, just like people. They needed food and drink and a place to live. So a god in the form of a wooden statue would live in the temple, and the priests would daily care for it. They would bathe the statue and dress it and serve it two meals a day. Those meals were not little snacks, either. A clay tablet found in the ruins of a temple tells us that one meal for the god might include forty sheep, eight lambs, seventy ducks, and fifty-four jugs of wine. To the Sumerian people, it was absolutely necessary that the priests provide well for the gods.

When the gods were happy, the people believed that they blessed the city and brought good crops and lovely weather. When the gods were upset or neglected, in the people's minds, it was they who brought drought and storms and enemy armies down upon the city.

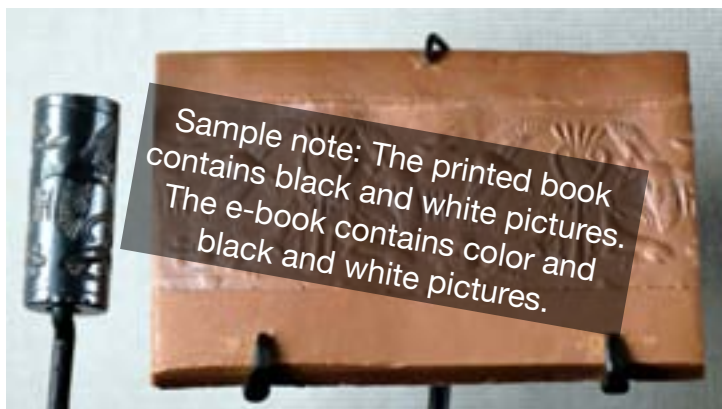
If you were to stroll away from the temple, you would enter the city's marketplace, the bazaar. There, booths and stalls line the street, offering everything a person might want or need. Merchants sold all sorts of food: fruits, vegetables, chickens, dried fish, cheese, and spices of all kinds. Other shopkeepers would offer clothing or pottery or copper kettles. All of these goods came into the city either from nearby farmers and shepherds or from faraway lands, brought to Sumer on the backs of camels in long caravans or in the hulls of merchant ships sailing the Mediterranean Sea or the Persian Gulf.

The two rivers were like highways, bringing wood and metal from Akkad in the north on long barges, while camel caravans trudged upstream along the rivers' hard-packed banks, their saddlebags full to the brim with Sumer's grain and wool to trade with their northern neighbors.

You might notice that the shoppers are all paying with bags of grain or small squares of silver, and you don't have either of those things, so you decide you won't be doing any shopping today.

Leaving the bazaar, you find yourself on a much quieter street. Across from you is an open-fronted stall, and there you see a man hunched over a small, low table, working carefully. Wandering closer, you can see that he holds a tiny cylinder of some hard white material. Could it be ivory? He is carving it delicately with tiny pointed tools: a chisel and drill. He notices your gaze and, with a smile, gestures for you to come and watch his work. You can see that the cylinder must be almost complete. He has carved a tiny hunting scene onto it with lions and antelope and miniature archers and spearmen.

It is a beautiful little thing, but you don't really understand it until he finishes the final detail and then demonstrates it for you. He shows you a large jar of olive oil that sits nearby. He smooths a band of soft clay along the rim of the jar and rolls the little cylinder over it. The hunting scene appears as one continuous pattern in the clay, almost like magic. You smile and applaud, and then the artist gestures to the cylinder, the jar, and himself, and now you understand. The pattern made by the little cylinder is like a signature; it marks this jar as belonging to this man and this man only.

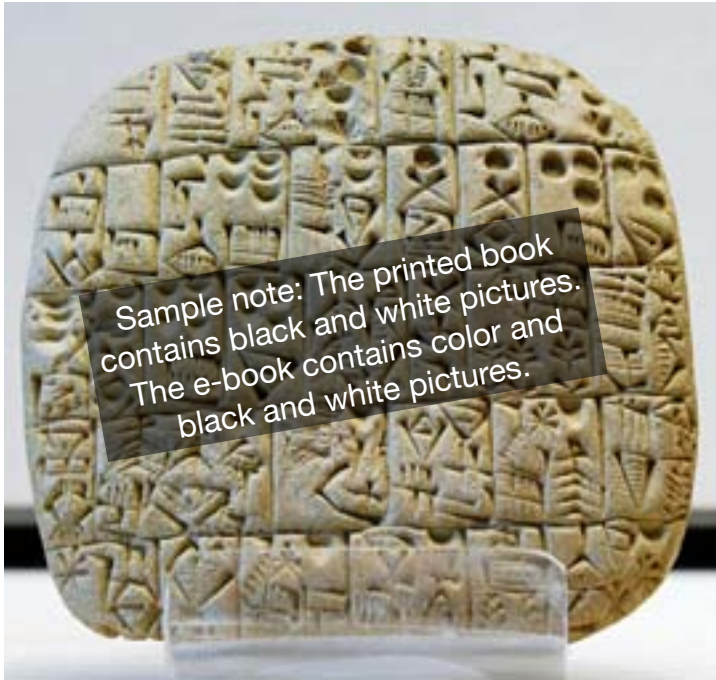


Cylinder seal

The little cylinder is called a seal. Seals from Sumer and Mesopotamia are still being found by archaeologists all over the ancient world. Because they showed ownership, every merchant and shopkeeper would have one and use it to mark which things were his, especially important if several merchants were joining their camels and goods together to form a long caravan.

After you nod your thanks to the seal artist, you continue on to the end of the street. There you find a little open square and a large, rather important-looking house. Through the open

doorway, you can see a group of boys, not much older than yourself, all focusing intently on a man at the front of the room. *A school*, you think, and you are right. As you watch, the teacher finishes his instruction and all the young men bend over their work. They are pressing small, wedge-shaped sticks into tablets of soft clay. They are writing, you realize.



Cuneiform writing on a stone sales contract

The writing they are doing is called cuneiform, and it might be the most important thing you see today in the city. Cuneiform writing began as picture-writing; but as time went by, the Sumerians started to use wedge-shaped symbols instead of pictures, because it is quicker to stamp out a pattern with the little wedge-shaped stick than it is to draw pictures in the damp clay. Each wedge-shape pattern stands for an object or idea. Cuneiform isn't an alphabet, like you are reading

right now, where each letter represents a sound and can be combined in any way to make words. Instead, the cuneiform shapes stand for the names of things, and these name-sounds can be combined to say whatever is needed. It would be like if you lived in the town of Fish Creek, and to write the name of your town you drew a little fish and a symbol for moving water: Fish Creek. That's how cuneiform worked; the symbols could mean either an object itself or the sound of that object's name.

Whew! Is that confusing? It was a difficult language then too. Cuneiform has more than six hundred symbols! The only ones who could read and write in Sumer were the kings and noblemen and the scribes, who went to school for many years in order to learn how to do it.

Cuneiform is important, though, because it is one of the oldest examples of written language that archaeologists have found, and they have found lots of it! Because cuneiform was written on clay tablets, it can survive for thousands of years. Fires, floods, burial in deep sand—none of these can destroy clay tablets, so the writings of the Sumerians have lasted right up until today. While the scribes in Sumer were pressing their wedge-sticks into the clay, down in Egypt the people of the Black Land had started to develop their own type of writing in much the same way, as you shall see.

After leaving the school, you walk out toward the city gate and the thick city walls. Your visit here is almost complete. Looking back, you can see the people moving busily about their day, the merchants carefully weighing silver, the priests dutifully serving the gods, the artists delicately carving, the boys studying the complicated cuneiform. It looks very different from your life; but then again, perhaps not so different. After all, a city is a city, isn't it? People live there and work and eat and sleep and play. Let's go look at another one and see if it is the same!