Ancient Egypt – Land Of The River Essay, Research Paper

?All of Egypt is the gift of the Nile.? It was the Greek historian Herodotus who made that observation. The remarkable benefits of the Nile are clear to everyone, but through history he was the first to talk about it and consider its fascination. Through history, the Nile played a major role in the building of civilizations. The first civilizations to appear in history started on a river valley or in a place where resources are numerous and example of these are in India where Indus river is found and Tigris where Euphrates is found and many other places (cradles of civilization).

The Nile is the longest river in the world, cuts a swath of green and life through the bareness of the giant Sahara desert in northern Africa. It is almost 4160 miles long from its remotest head stream, the Lavironza river in Burundi, in central Africa to its delta on the Mediterranean sea north east of Egypt. The river flows northward and drain 1100100 square miles, about tenth the size of Africa, passing through ten African countries. It has many tributaries but there are two main ones: the White Nile fed by lake Victoria and the Blue Nile coming from Ethiopian mountains. These two main branches join near Khartoum, the capital of Sudan and they continue together as Nile proper until meeting the Mediterranean Sea and forming the Nile delta in northern Egypt.

Around 5000 BC, one of the first great civilizations developed in the northern Nile river valley dependent on agriculture in a land called Egypt. Water; Fertile soil; and river?s flow north while prevailing wind blows south made the Nile the best transportation way, were examples of the Nile gifts. Another gift is that every year the flood came bringing disaster and famine due to destroying the crops and their villages. The first forms of government appeared in Egypt when the Egyptians organized their efforts under one leadership to avoid the disasters of the yearly flood.

On the other hand Nile flooding caused some problems in landmarks. Simple geometry had to be found to keep the boarder and a simple system metric (invention of the nilometer) to study the Nile flow and flood every year. As the state grew and more complex religious and political systems started to emerge, the need for a system to record events and rituals was growing too. Therefore, the need to have written records was of great importance. Because of that, the papyrus paper was found to satisfy that need. These are mainly the gifts of the Nile.

Being a rich source of water The Nile is seen as the foundation of life in ancient Egypt. Egyptians? water uses were numerous. Mainly water was used for drinking and for watering plants and crops. Irrigation systems were among the biggest achievement of the ancient Egyptians? civilization. They were primitive types of irrigation that depended very much on the physical geography and geology of the area but to their time, they were of great importance. All irrigation systems depend on taking water from a natural resource and diverting it to artificial channels or ponds where it is applied to crops. At first, before the irrigation systems were of great use and importance, Egyptian agriculture along the Nile was based on growing winter crops after flooding had subsided. But after many enhancements made in the field of irrigation methods, they were able to have more than one harvest a year and having more yields. These irrigation systems allowed them to grow plants that need watering all the time thus leading to more variety of crops. And due t the great amount of water the river delivers, it provided a constant water supply to the people of Egypt. Moreover, water uses are not limited to drinking and watering but it is also used for washing, bathing, manufacturing, building and many others.

The influence the Nile has is so extensive. Ancient Egypt was an agricultural estate and mainly relied on the flooding of the Nile for fertile soil. Inundation is the yearly gradual overflow of the Nile water or as we can say flood. Each year, in June and extending to the end of November, land would be covered with water and slowly water drains and flows back leaving behind high fertile soil. Its annual cycle of flooding and depositing of silt creates a new layer of topsoil each year. This topsoil is rich in organic nutrients and basic elements for plants such as ammonia and nitrogen. Besides this, when water recedes in October, it leaves behind pools of water in depressed areas whish is stored for some time until the soil could absorb more water therefore acting as a reservoir. On the other hand, the mud left by the flooding would be the best medium for planting their crops. Thus concluding that without the yearly flooding the soil would loose its fertility, as well as agriculture will loose its importance.

Nile gifts are not limited, another important issue arises from the unique river, which is transportation. The river?s flow north and the prevailing wind blows south made it obvious to the Egyptians to use it as a facilitated way of transportation. As known, Egypt was of two estates, Upper and Lower Egypt. For trade and moving from upper to Lower Egypt, the Egyptians used the Nile River as a highway. To go from Lower Egypt to Upper Egypt they used the flow of the river. Whereas moving from upper to Lower Egypt they used sail ships using the power of wind. An example of the Egyptians using this high way was when they transported the stones for the pyramids from Lower Egypt.

Flooding yearly caused many problems to Egyptians. In addition to its benefits to agriculture, each year flooding causes disasters to Egyptians present in the risk of their villages being damaged and their crops destroyed. So, Egyptians suffered many loses due to this yearly flooding. As an effect of that, the first form of government appeared when the Egyptians organized their efforts under one leadership to avoid these disasters and the yearly flooding following the concept of authority (decision making). As time past, the ruler (pharaoh) became more important with more power and influence on Egyptians. That simple government dealt with many problems that Egyptians were looking forward to control it like the irrigation systems, storage of food surplus, harvest cycle and many other tasks. But these acts were not for free and the government would not stand without having a resource or income so they had to follow the tax method. By time this form of government started to become more and more complex.

Inundation had to be studied after all to know exactly when is the flood going to happen and when shall they plant their crops. For that, the Egyptians invented a device called a nilometer to measure the level of the Nile and thus predict the extent of the flooding. Nilometers were built in various places along the river, they had three different formats ? a slab or pillar, a well or a series of steps but all three were calibrated using the same unit of measurement, the cubit (about two inches shorter). These nilometer readings were taken by priests and then studied by Egyptian architects and astronomers. The most important nilometers, built and studied all time, were located at Elephantine Island, Philae Island, and at Edfu between Luxor and Aswan. Knowing that the Nile flooded ever year, a yearly calendar was made depending on that. This calendar consisted of twelve months and divided each one to thirty days and it was the most accurate in its time. For time knowledge the Egyptians used the sundials but they also used water dial more extensively (they used them during cloudy days). Furthermore, because of flooding erasing the boundaries of land. A simple form of geometry was found to redraw them.

A new type of gifts, which the Nile offered to Egypt at that time, was in the field of writing. Papyrus is a plant that used to grow on the riverbank of the Nile and now is extinct. It is one to three meters in height and has a woody, arom creeping rhizome. Its leaves are long and sharp keeled and the upright flowering stems are naked, soft and triangular in shape. The lower part of the stem is as thick as a human arm and at the top is compound umbel of numerous dropping spikelets with a whorl of eight leaves. This plant was very important to ancient Egyptians. It was mainly used for production of papyrus paper. The special method to prepare this paper is as follows::

The stalks of the papyrus plant are harvested

Next the green skin of the stalks is removed and the inner pith is taken out and cut into strips. The strips are then pounded and soaked in water for three days until pliable.

The strips are then cut to the length desired and laid horizontally over the horizontal strips resulting in the criss-cross pattern in papyrus paper. Another cotton sheet is placed on top.

The sheet is put in a press and squeezed together, with the cotton sheets being replaced until all the moisture is removed.

Finally, all the strips are pressed together forming a single sheet of papyrus paper.

A sheet a papyrus varies between 5 by 9 inches to 9 by 15 inches.

This production of paper factored in affecting the development of Egyptian societies. Its method of production was kept secret thus starting to have a monopoly on it. And they transported them and used them for trade with others. Not only papyrus plants were used for paper, they were used also in manufacturing boots, sandals, houses and others.

On the banks of the Nile arose one of the most advanced and powerful civilizations in the ancient world. The Nile represented the life of Egypt every time it flooded and brought about its fortunes. All the scientific, political, and agricultural advancements were a direct results of the existence this river