

Ancient Irrigation

The Ancient Egyptians were a competent lot. They knew that the Nile flooded each year and that it brought nutrients and water to the soil. This meant that they could grow more crops. Unfortunately, the floodwaters didn't always reach as far as they needed. On top of that, they needed water for their crops once the floodwaters had drained away. They invented a complex system of irrigation that allowed them to use the water from the Nile whenever they needed it.

If you've ever carried a bucket of water, you'll know that it can get quite heavy. You need a lot of water to keep a whole field of crops looking lush. Carrying that many buckets would have taken a lot of time and energy. The Egyptians had a better idea.

Look at the image below. You can see where the farmers have dug channels away from the river and around each field. Some of these were connected directly to the river. This was harder to control how much water went to each field. Luckily, there was another invention that could help.



This is called a “shaduf”. A shaduf was a type of crane that could be used to lift heavy weights. This is a large shaduf that was used to raise stones and water for building work. If you look closely at the picture above, you can see smaller shadufs at the end of two of the canals.

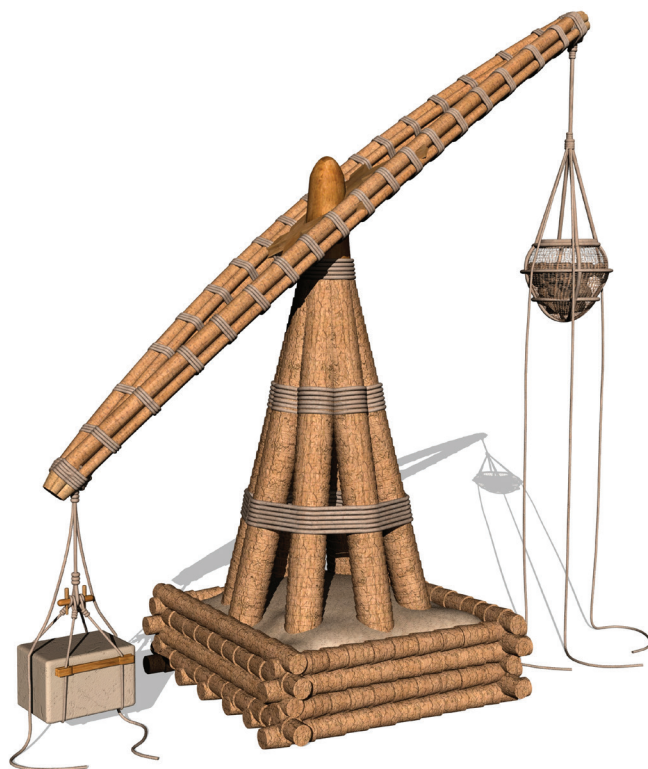
These smaller shadufs could be operated by one person. They were lowered into the Nile and then swung around until the bucket was over the canal.

The farmer could then tip the water into the canal, where it would



flow away to the field. This gave them more control over how much water went to each field. It was also a lot easier than carrying lots of buckets.

By using the Nile in this way, the Egyptians were able to become one of the most powerful and long-last civilisations in history. There is very little rainfall in Egypt, so without the life-giving waters of the Nile, it would be almost entirely desert. There wouldn't have been enough land to grow food for such a large nation. Even the annual flooding of the Nile wouldn't have allowed the Egyptians to prosper as much as they did. Their knowledge of farming, irrigation and technology allowed them to thrive for thousands of years.



RETRIEVAL FOCUS

1. Find and copy a word from the first paragraph that means “clever” or “good at something”.
2. Which word in the first paragraph tells the reader that the system of irrigation that they used included lots of different parts working together?
3. Write an antonym for “raise”.
4. If something is “annual”, how often does it happen?
5. Which word in the text has a meaning closest to “live a full and happy life”?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

S

How did the canals make it easier to water fields?

S

How did the shaduf remove the need for lots of journeys with a bucket?

R

True or false: Egypt would be a jungle without the Nile.

R

True or false: irrigation meant that there was enough food for most Ancient Egyptians.