Natural resources
Apart from the Nile and its bounty, Egypt enjoyed a wide variety of mineral and other resources. Within its own borders were rich deposits of gold that had been mined from earliest times. Areas surrounding the Wadi Hammamat in the east and the deserts near Edfu in the south were important sources. Aswan was the major source of granite, used for a variety of building projects, especially obelisks and statues. As well it supplied the precious stones carnelian and amethyst. Egyptian kings sent expeditions to Sinai to mine turquoise, a stone highly valued for royal jewellery. Nubia to the south was rich in gold, ebony, stone for statues and monuments, panther skins and ostrich feathers, which explains the Egyptian pharaohs’ enthusiasm for keeping it under firm control.

The oases to the west provided valuable deposits of raw materials for the New Kingdom Egyptians. The Kharga, Dakhla and Siwa oases were famous for their wines and dates, while the Wadi Natrun to the west of the Delta provided the natron which was essential for mummification ritual practices.

For further investigation
Find answers to the following questions.
◆ Where was the source of the Nile?
◆ How did the Egyptians explain the phenomenon of the annual flood?
◆ What gods were associated with the Nile?

Activity
Make a copy of the map in Figure 1.1. Locate and highlight the following features:
◆ the Delta
◆ Upper Egypt
◆ Lower Egypt
◆ Aswan
◆ Memphis
◆ Thebes
◆ Wadi Hammamat
◆ Kharga, Dakhla and Siwa oases
◆ Mediterranean Sea
◆ Red Sea
◆ Libya
◆ the Nile valley
◆ Red Land
◆ Black Land
◆ Nubia.

Make a mind map of Egypt’s resources using the following categories:
◆ mineral resources
◆ the Nile
◆ natural resources.

Using the mind-map summary write a paragraph about the resources of Egypt. Write definitions for the following terms: delta, cataract, oasis, wadi, inundation and silt.

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The pharaoh
What is the king of Upper and Lower Egypt? . . . He is a god by whose dealings one lives, the father and mother of all men . . .

(Inscription from the Theban tomb of the vizier Rekhmire)

The word ‘pharaoh’ is the Greek form of the ancient Egyptian term ‘per-aa’ which means ‘great house’. It originally referred to the palace of the king rather than to the king himself. Like many ancient rulers, the Egyptian pharaoh enjoyed absolute power over his subjects. He was the embodiment both of earthly and divine authority, and was regarded as god and king by his people.

Evidence for the role of the king and his link to the gods can be found in the royal titulary, the names or titles that all pharaohs bore. In addition to his personal name received at birth, each pharaoh acquired four other titles when he came to the throne. Every royal inscription, moreover, was prefaced by a section that listed the king’s titles and epithets.

The kingship was usually passed from father to son and the New Kingdom saw vivid portrayals of some rulers’ attempts to show their unquestioned right to the position. For example, Ramesses II had scenes of his divine conception and birth carved on the walls of the Ramesseum.

The pharaoh and the concept of Maat
The primary duty of the pharaoh as the representative of the gods was to maintain the divine order, called ‘Maat’, which had been established at the beginning of creation. The world had been created out of a watery chaos, and life as the Egyptians saw it was in continual tension between order and chaos. The concept of Maat embodied truth, justice and the essential harmony of the universe. Maat was usually represented as a goddess wearing an ostrich feather. Her power regulated
the seasons, the movement of the stars and the relations between the people and their gods.

The pharaoh’s duty was to maintain this cosmic order. This was primarily accomplished by daily offerings to the gods manifested in cult statues in the temples. These rituals were usually delegated to the high priests and their attendants. The Egyptians believed that in return for these attentions to their daily needs, the gods would protect them and keep the forces of chaos at bay.

Because the pharaoh was the chief channel of divine power and guidance he exercised supreme authority in the land and all aspects of Egyptian life were his responsibility. He was therefore chief priest of all the religious cults, chief judge and supreme commander of the army. As mediator between the gods and people the king’s religious role was of particular importance. To ensure their continued ability to carry out this ritual role, some pharaohs conducted a Sed festival, or Jubilee festival.

For further investigation

Choose one pharaoh from each of the New Kingdom dynasties and compile a short dossier on each one. Find the following:

- their titles
- pictures of statues and reliefs showing the image that each pharaoh projected
- the significant achievements of each pharaoh’s reign. You could present this information as a mind-map, arranging your information according to military, building, political, religious and economic achievements.

Activity: writing task

Write an essay response to the following question:

- What was the position and role of the pharaoh in New Kingdom society?
The royal wives

As well as being head of the government, the pharaoh was also the head of the royal family. Supporting him were a number of women usually referred to as ‘queens’. It is important to note that there were several types of queen (see Table 1.2).

Queens were sometimes the sister or the half-sister of the pharaoh but daughters of commoners were also chosen and could become ‘great royal wife’. The families of such women were probably prominent members of the official class, or if not were likely to become so on the elevation of their female relatives. Some pharaohs of this period seem to have married their own daughters. Ramesses II’s daughters Bint Anath, Meritamun and Nebettawy became ‘great royal wives’ of their father and Bint Anath even bore him a child.

Diplomatic marriages

Ramesside pharaohs also married the daughters of neighbouring powers to reinforce diplomatic alliances. Some were the daughters of the pharaoh’s equals, sent to assure friendly relations between the two powers. Others were sent by their vassal fathers as signs of their loyalty and submission to Egypt. In addition to a Babylonian princess and the daughter of a Syrian ruler, Ramesses II married two Hittite princesses (see Chapter 7). The first of these marriages took place in Year 34 of his reign and confirmed the peace treaty, ending the hostilities between Egypt and Khatti. The following source shows the diplomatic role played by the Hittite princess.

SOURCE 1.1

Now after they saw their land in this miserable state under the great power of the Lord of the Two Lands, then the great prince of Khatti said to his soldiers and his courtiers: ‘Now see this! Our land is devastated…Let us strip ourselves of all our possessions, and with my oldest daughter in front of them, let us carry peace offerings to the Good god [i.e. the king of Egypt], that he may give us peace, that we might live.’ Then he caused his oldest daughter to be brought, the costly tribute before her consisting of gold and silver, many great ores, innumerable horses, cattle sheep and...