# Argumentative Writing

# Egypt vs. Persia

## Overview

The purpose of this Interdisciplinary Writing test is to determine how well you can write to persuade others to think as you do about an issue. In this test, you will read four articles about an important issue; take a position on the issue and write a first draft of an argumentative essay. You must support your position with information from ***each***of the source materials.

## About This Performance Task

In this Interdisciplinary Writing test, you will think about and take a position on a controversial issue: Historians have long studied the ancient cultures of Egypt and Persia. Both established long lasting and successful empires. It has long been a topic of debate as to which empire would have been better to live in. Your task is to decide where you would rather have lived, and argue why.

Source #1

The Persian Empire: Culture and Society

Society

Since the Persian empire embraced many nations and cultures, each with its own distinctive social structure, it is impossible to speak of “society” in the singular. However, there were some trends within the empire which were felt throughout the empire.

The first was the spread of a Persian or Iranian landowning class. When the Persians conquered a kingdom, some or all of the vanquished kings’ and nobles’ estates were confiscated and taken over by the Persian king. He kept much for himself and the royal family, but he also distributed much of it to his high officials and the Persian nobility. The extensive estates of the Persian ruling class thus came to be scattered throughout the empire, from Egypt and Asia Minor to Bactria.

Mesopotamia in particular seems to have been the location for vast estates. With its very productive agriculture and comparative proximity to the Iranian homeland, this region must have been regarded as highly attractive for Persian landowners.

Another social development was the expansion, already seen under the late Babylonian kings, of the merchant classes. This was the result of the expansion of trade and banking (see below). Some merchants and bankers became very wealthy indeed, and became large landowners. Linked to this development was the spread of urban settlement outside those regions such as Mesopotamia, Syria and Asia Minor which had experienced this for millennia. Iran itself, the imperial homeland but hitherto on the margins of the civilized world, became much more urbanized than before, as did the lands to its east.

The vast majority of the population of the empire lived by farming, as in all pre-modern societies. It is hard to compare the condition of the peasantry with that in other periods of ancient history. For the most part they were spared the upheavals that war brings, and taxation was probably no heavier than in other periods. In the less settled times of the later Persian empire, however, the irrigation systems of Mesopotamia seem to have experienced some neglect, and this will have led to the condition of the peasantry there deteriorating.

Economy

Agriculture provided the economic base of the Persian empire, and this benefitted from improvements under the Persians The empire was covered with huge estates, owned by the monarchy and Persian nobility, and in some parts, the temples and even business houses. These estates were farmed by tenants, or worked directly by hired labor. In some places gangs of slaves worked the land.

By no means all the land was in the hands of large landowners. Individual peasant farmers also owned much of the land. Their numbers may well have been boosted by time-expired soldiers being allotted land, and some state land was also given over to soldiers serving in military garrisons, to enable them to be self-sufficient.

Irrigation, on which much agriculture depended within the empire and especially in Mesopotamia and Iran, received much attention from the government, at least under the early kings. The kings took seriously the Mesopotamian royal tradition of looking after the irrigation system in which agriculture there depended, and this period also seems to have seen a major spread of irrigation in Iran. This largely resulted from the increased use of the *qanat*, an underground water channel which carried water from hills to plains and which allowed large areas of land in arid landscapes to be irrigated and turned over to productive cultivation. The Persian government encouraged the construction and restoration of *qanats* through generous tax incentives. Where previously only nomads could graze their herds, sizeable farming settlements were now able to develop.

So far as trade was concerned, the Persian empire probably provided more favorable circumstances than any before it. The huge size of the empire meant that millions of people lived generally in peace together, under one rule.

A single legal and administrative framework meant that commercial transactions between members of different nationalities could be undertaken with confidence that, if any disputes arose, they could be dealt with by the same courts operating the same law. International business houses could operate on a larger scale than hitherto. Furthermore, in the Zagros mountain passes, through which major trade routes passed, brigandage was suppressed to a degree never before achieved, at least under the firm government of the early Persians

Specific policies of the Persian kings, particularly Darius the Great, also favored trade. He standardized weights and measures across the empire, and also introduced a single monetary system, based on a two-tier gold and silver coinage. The impact of this development was limited somewhat by the habit of later Persian kings to hoard gold and silver in their treasuries, which constrained the amount of metal coinage in circulation. In fact, it was only the Mediterranean provinces, which were most exposed to Greek commercial practices, which became truly monetized at this time. The eastern parts of the empire continued to use units of silver in commercial transactions. However, the standardization of such units throughout the empire allowed banking to expand considerably, and become more international. Some firms in Babylonia, which already had a long history of banking, became enormously wealthy, and were able to use their capital to branch out into large-scale land ownership and tax farming.

International conditions were increasingly favorable to long distance trade at the time of the Persian empire, especially in the Middle East. One common language, Aramaic, now covered the region, and the universally-understood Aramaic alphabetical script would have made communications between members of different races easier. Also, the rise of the empire coincided with the expansion of urban civilization in northern India. This certainly stimulated international trade within the Persian empire, and east-west trade routes, both maritime (see below) and overland, became much more important than they had been before. Using such routes was made safer and easier for merchants by the fact that western areas of the Indian subcontinent were in Persian hands. This not only meant that they enjoyed effective protection, but they also benefitted from the Persian kings’ road-building program.

Darius ordered the construction of new roads, and the upgrading and maintenance of existing ones. The backbone of the empire’s road network was the “Royal Road”, which connected Susa with Sardis and Ephesus, in Asia Minor, and ran through Assyria and Armenia. Other roads linked Persepolis and Susa with Babylon, then on up to Syria, and then south through modern-day Israel to Egypt; yet others connected Babylon to Ecbatana, Bactria and India.

This road construction was aimed primarily, as we have seen, at ensuring communications could be as swift as possible between the center and provinces, and at facilitating the movement of troops about the empire. However, good roads act as a major boost to trade. The roads were well constructed, all-weather ways with grooves for wheeled vehicles (carts and chariots). They were protected by patrols and furnished with inns. The network of these Persian roads survived long after the fall of the empire.

Maritime trade was stimulated by Darius’ completion of an ancient version of the Suez Canal, linking the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea. The canal allowed ships to sail from India to the Mediterranean (it was broad enough for two triremes to sail along side by side), and could be passed through in four days. It encouraged the development of a valuable trade route along which the spices of southern Arabia and India were brought to the west. This canal had a tendency to silt up, and required continual dredging to keep open. In the later period of the Persian empire this was not able to be carried out (mainly because Egypt was in constant revolt), and it fell into disuse.

The royal household also had a direct impact on the economy. It formed a huge economic unit in its own right, a state-within-a-state. As well as owning large estates scattered throughout the empire, embracing more than a hundred towns within Iran, it owned and managed multitudes of industrial enterprises. These were on the whole small craft workshops, but between them they employed thousands of workers. The royal properties and enterprises were managed as a unified organization which spanned the entire empire. It must have required a major bureaucracy to run it.

Religion

The Persian kings’ religious policy was characterized by tolerance towards their subject peoples’ beliefs and practices. The most famous instance of this is their dealings with the Jewish exiles who they found in Babylon and other Mesopotamian cities after their conquest of that region. Cyrus allowed them to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their temple. Darius funded the restoration of the Jewish temple; and Artaxerxes I sent the Jewish priest Ezra to Jerusalem to reintroduce temple worship and the old Mosaic Law back into Jewish life. Later he sent a Jew who had risen high in his service, Nehemiah, to enhance the security of the people of Jerusalem by rebuilding the walls of the city.

Darius made sure that his officials respected the religious practices of his subjects, as is shown in a letter to his official, Gadatas, ordering him to restore a Greek sanctuary. When in Egypt both Cambyses and Darius were careful to observe traditional Egyptian rites related to kingship.

As for the kings themselves, they held firmly to their devotion to Ahura Mazda, the chief god of the Iranians. Whether the kings were loyal to the ancestral polytheism of the Iranians, or were followers of the newer faith of Zoroastrianism, a monotheistic creed which had grown up in Iran and which worshipped Ahura Mazda alone, is not clear. Some of their expressions seem to contain Zoroastrian sentiments, but there is no mention of Zoroaster (the founder of the religion) himself. Whatever the case, Zoroastrianism certainly spread around their empire, particularly in Armenia, Asia Minor, and Mesopotamia.

Culture

The literature, art and architecture of the Persian empire is essentially that of its constituent peoples. In Babylonia, for example, traditional Mesopotamian temples and ziggurats were constructed and refurbished, and temple life went on much as before. In fact, the Persian period saw Babylonian astronomy continue to develop, with new observations being made and calculations refined. In Egypt, temples and statues continued to be erected in the age-old style, and official and priestly texts stood firmly in their ancient tradition. The newly rebuilt temple in Jerusalem was designed to resemble its predecessor which had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar’s army, and the Jews committed much of their scriptures to writing at this time. The Greek cities of Asia Minor participated fully in the cultural developments taking place on the Greek mainland at that time; they produced eminent thinkers such as Heraclitus of Ephesus, who was a major figure in the advancement of Greek philosophy.

Nevertheless, there was a distinctive Persian art and architecture which appeared at this time. This was the imperial art of the Persian kings, and was embodied in the magnificent palaces and royal tombs which they ordered to be constructed in their capitals at Pasargadae, Persepolis and [Susa](https://www.timemaps.com/history-elam#susa). It was solemn and dignified, designed to awe visitors by displaying the mighty power of the kings.

The early Persian kings in particular, Cyrus, Darius, Xerxes and Artaxerxes I, were prolific builders. Their typical edifices were huge palaces, adorned with giant reliefs typically depicting the king with multitudes of subjects bringing tribute. At the center of these complex of buildings and courtyards, laid out with a spaciousness not found in Babylonian buildings, lay many-pillared audience halls, still impressive today, even as ruins.

The design of the buildings and the sculptured reliefs are essentially based on Babylonian and Assyrian forms, which themselves were the culmination of thousands of years of Mesopotamian stylistic tradition. However, the Persians added elements of their own. For example, the palace-complexes tended to rest on terraced platforms, a feature not found in traditional Mesopotamian design. Another important architectural feature was the many-pillared hall, which probably derived from the wooden halls of Iranian kings and chiefs but was reproduced on a grand scale in the imperial palaces of Susa and Persepolis.

The fact that these buildings were constructed by teams of skilled craftsmen drawn from all over a multinational empire resulted in them embodying a diversity not seen anywhere else before. Living and working together as they did, these workers introduced new elements into the Babylonian framework, from widely varying traditions. The result was a unique syncretism, in which the influence of Greek masters can be seen in the way the formal style of Babylonian figurative design is modified with a more human, more fluid quality, or the slender columns in the audience halls show Egyptian and Greek motifs.

The overall result is a unique fusion. This is reflected in the range of materials used, which came from all over the empire. One inscription says that, whereas previous buildings had previously been constructed mostly of clay bricks, the new palaces used stone from Elam for the columns, and cedar timber from Lebanon for the roofs; and they incorporated gold from Lydia and Bactria (i.e from opposite ends of the empire), lapis lazuli, carnelian and turquoise from central Asia, silver and ebony from Egypt, dyes for the wall-reliefs from Ionia, and the ivory from Nubia and India. It emphasizes that the work of crafting these materials into fine objects was done on the spot, by stonemasons from Asia Minor (Greeks and Lydians), goldsmiths from Medea and Egypt, woodcarvers from Lydia and Egypt, brick layers from Babylonia, and wall-painters from Medea and Egypt. The only fragment of sculpture in the round so far found shows strong Greek influence – was in fact probably the work of a Greek sculptor.

To the northwest of Persepolis are four majestic tombs of Persian kings. These are carved into a rock face in the Zagros mountains, to exactly the same design. Their huge (22 meters high) fronts depict the sculptured facade of a palace with tall columns, above which the kings are shown before a fire altar. They stand on platforms supported by the representatives of the thirty nations belonging to the empire.

One final piece of Persian art must be mentioned, the great relief and inscription which Darius the Great had carved into the rock face at Behistun, high above the road that passes through the Zagros mountains from Babylon to Ecbatana. This monumental relief, located 66 meters above the road, shows Darius, accompanied by two attendants, with his foot on the body of his rival for the throne, Gaumata. Other rebels are shown with their hands tied behind their backs and a rope around their necks; above the whole is the symbol of the chief god, Ahura Mazda.

Large numbers of beautiful small objects have been found: metal tableware (vessels, plates, cult utensils) in gold and silver, jewelry (earrings, bracelets), weapons (daggers), seals and gems cut in the old Mesopotamian manner but with Iranian figures.

One cultural feature, which the Persians inherited from previous Mesopotamian cultures and spread around their empire, was landscaped gardening. The Assyrians had laid out extensive parks and gardens around their royal palaces, and the famous “Hanging Gardens” of Babylon were probably just such an artefact. In the Persian period, such pleasure grounds were created around their empire. The Greek word for them was the same as our word “paradise”, which aptly sums up their role as places of beauty and relaxation. They were designed to enable Persian kings and nobles could take their ease.

By Wayne Rooney – “A Footballers Guide to the Persian People”

Source #2

The Society of the Egyptian Empire

Ancient Egypt was a narrow strip of land along the Nile River. Each year the river flooded its banks, leaving behind a fertile fringe of soil they called "the Black Land," while the desert all around the Nile valley was called "the Red Land." It was here the Ancient Egyptians built their homes.

**Homer Decor**

Egyptian homes were made from bricks of sun dried mud, called adobe, because wood was scarce. A nobleman's home was divided into three areas: a reception area, a hall, and the private quarters. The windows and doors on the house were covered with mats to keep out the flies, dust, and heat. The inside walls were decorated with wall hangings made of leather, and the floors were covered with tile. Sometimes there was a room on the roof with three walls where the family slept on hot summer nights.

The commoners lived in town houses usually two to three stories high. The first story of the town home was usually reserved for businesses, while the second and third floors provided the family living space. Many people slept on the roof during the summer to keep cool. Sewage had to be disposed of by each household in pits, in the river, or in the streets. Most all people had some furniture consisting mostly of a stool, small boxes for jewelry and cosmetics, chests for clothing, pottery jars, and oil lamps. Each home was equipped with at least one fly catcher.

**Meals**

Cooking was done in clay ovens as well as over open fires. Wood was used for fuel, even though it was scarce. Food was baked, boiled, stewed, fried, grilled, or roasted. What is known about kitchen utensils and equipment is from the items that have been found in the tombs. Storage jars, bowls, pots, pans, ladles, sieves, and whisks were all used in the preparation of food. Most of the commoners used dishes that were made of clay, while the wealthy used dishes made of bronze, silver, and gold.

Beer was the most popular beverage, and bread was the staple food in the Egyptian diet. The beer was made with barley. The barley was left to dry, and then baked into loaves of bread. The baked barley loaves were then broken into pieces and mixed with the dried grain in a large jug of water and left to ferment. Wine was a drink that was produced by the Egyptians, however, it was usually found only at the tables of the wealthy. To make the bread, women ground wheat into flour. The flour was then pounded by men to make a fine grain. Sesame seeds, honey, fruit, butter, and herbs were often added to the dough to help flavor the bread.

**Marriage**

Peasant girls usually married around the age 12, the boys were a few years older than the girls. Girls of more affluent families married a few years older. The marriages were arranged by parents of the children although some young people chose their own spouse. While the ordinary man normally had one wife, the kings always had several. Before the marriage ceremony, an agreement was signed by the couple. The pre-nuptial agreement stated that the wife was to receive an allowance from her husband. The contract also stated that any material good the wife brought into the marriage was hers to keep if the marriage ended for any reason. Both could own land separate from each other but the wife usually let her husband administer her land along with his.

Divorce was an option, although it was not common. If a husband treated his wife badly, she would go to her family for help. The wife's family would try to persuade her spouse to change his behavior. If his behavior did not improve the divorce took place. The divorce was a simple procedure consisting of making a simple statement to annul the marriage in front of witnesses. The wife was given custody of the children and was free to remarry.

**Family Life**

The people of ancient Egypt highly valued family life. They treasured children and regarded them as a great blessing. In the lower class families, the mother raised the children. The wealthy and nobility, had slaves and servants that helped take care of the children by attending to their daily needs. If a couple had no children, they would pray to the gods and goddesses for help. They would also place letters at the tombs of dead relatives asking them to use their influence with the gods. Magic was also used as an attempt to have children. In event that a couple still could not conceive a child, adoption was also an option.

Although women were expected to obey their fathers and husbands, they were equal to men in many ways. They had the legal right to participate in business deals, own land, and were expected to represent themselves in court cases. Women even faced the same penalties as men. Sometimes wives and mothers of pharaohs were the "real" ruling power in government, though they ruled unknowingly to common people. Queen Hatshepsut was the only woman who ruled out right by declaring herself pharaoh. An Egyptian wife and mother were highly respected in this ancient society.

Young boys learned a trade or craft from their fathers or an artisan. Young girls worked and received their training at home with their mothers. Those who could afford it sent their sons, from about the age 7, to school to study religion, reading, writing, and arithmetic. Even though there is no evidence of schools for girls, some were home taught to read and write and some even became doctors. Children were expected to look after their elderly parents. Upon their parent’s death, the sons inherited the land, while daughters inherited the household goods such as furniture and jewelry. If there were no sons in the family, there was nothing preventing the daughters from inheriting the land. There is evidence of some women inheriting entire estates.

Although women were expected to raise the children and take care of the household duties, there were some jobs available to them. Women ran farms and businesses in the absence of their husbands or sons. Women were employed in courts and temples as acrobats, dancers, singers and musicians. Wealthy families hired maids or nannies to help with household chores and the raising of the children. Noblewomen could become a priestess. Women also worked as professional mourners and perfume makers.

**Personal Grooming**

Cleansing rituals were very important to the Egyptians. Most people bathed daily in the river or out of a water basin at home. The wealthy had a separate room in their home to bath. Servants would pour jugs of water over their master (the equivalent of a modern day shower). The runoff water drained away through a pipe that led to the garden. Instead of washing with soap, a cleansing cream was used. This cream was made from oil, lime, and perfume.

People rubbed themselves daily with perfumed oil. Perfume was made from flowers and scented wood mixed with oil or fat, and was left in a pot until the oil had absorbed the scent. The perfumed oil was used to prevent the skin from drying out in the harsh climate. At parties, servants put cones of perfumed grease on the heads of the guests. As the grease melted, it ran down their face with a pleasing cooling effect.

Men, women and children of all ages and classes wore makeup. Mirrors of highly polished silver or copper were used to aid with the application of makeup. Eye paint was made from green malachite, and galena -- a gray lead ore. They were ground into a powder and mixed with oil to make eye color called Kohl. The Kohl was kept in jars and applied to the eyes with a small stick. The upper and lower eyelids were painted with the black cosmetic that extended in a line out to the sides of the face. It was believed the makeup had magical and even healing powers. Some even believed that wearing it would restore poor eyesight. It was also used to fight eye infections and reduce the glare of the sun.

Other cosmetics used included colors for the lips, cheeks and nails. A type of clay called red ochre was ground and mixed with water, and applied to the lips and cheeks. Henna was used to dye the fingernails yellow and orange. Makeup was stored in special jars and the jars were stored in special makeup boxes. Women would carry their makeup boxes with them to parties and keep them under their chairs.

Hair styles were very similar to that of todays. The common folk wore their hair short. Young girls usually kept their hair in pigtails while boys had shaved heads, except for one braided lock worn to one side. Wigs were worn by both men and women. The wigs were made of sheep's wool or human hair for decoration and for protection from the heat. Wigs were usually worn at parties and official functions. Hair pieces were also added to real hair to enhance it. When not in use, wigs were stored in special boxes on a stand inside the home.

**Clothing**

Egyptian clothing styles did not change much throughout ancient times. Clothes were usually made of linens ranging from coarse to fine texture. During the Old and Middle kingdoms, men usually wore a short skirt called a kilt. Women wore a straight fitting dress held up by straps. The wealthy men wore pleated kilts, and the older men wore a longer kilt. When doing hard work, men wore a loin cloth, and women wore a short skirt. Children usually ran around nude during the summer months, while in the winter, wraps and cloaks were worn. Noblewomen sometimes wore beaded dresses.

During the New Kingdom, noblemen would sometimes wear a long robe over his kilt, while the women wore long pleated dresses with a shawl. Some kings and queens wore decorative ceremonial clothing with feathers and sequins. Most people went barefoot, but wore sandals on special occasions. The king wore very elaborately decorated sandals and sometimes decorative gloves on his hands. Clothing styles were chosen for comfort in the hot, dry climate of Egypt.

Everyone in Egypt wore some type of jewelry. Rings and amulets were especially worn to ward off the evil spirits and injury. Both men and women wore pierced earrings, armlets, bracelets, and anklets. The rich wore jeweled or beaded collars, called a wesekh, necklaces, and pendants. For the rich, jewelry was made of gold, silver, or electrum (gold mixed with silver) and inlaid with semi-precious stones of turquoise, lapis lazuli (a deep blue stone), and carnelian (a copper or reddish orange stone). The poorer people wore jewelry that was made of copper or faience (made by heating powdered quartz).

**Government**

In the pre-civilization time, people found living in the Nile River Valley provided them a safe environment. The Nile River Valley was a rich area because of the annual flooding of the river. Over time the various groups organized themselves into two separate governments called the Upper Kingdom and the Lower Kingdom. About 3100 BC., Menes, the ruler of Upper Egypt, conquered the Lower Egyptian Kingdom. Menes united and became the first ruler of both Upper and Lower Egypt. Where the two kingdoms met, Menes built the capital of Memphis.

To the people of Egypt, the ruler, later called pharaoh, was more than a king. He was considered by many to be a god. As a god, pharaoh was believed to possess the secrets of heaven and earth. The pharaoh was a living embodiment of the Egyptian Gods, and this is why his power was considered absolute by the Egyptians. The pharaoh was responsible for all aspects of Egyptian life -- keeping the irrigation works in order, directing the army, keeping peace, and issuing laws. He also controlled trade and the economy. The base of the pharaoh's power was his control of the land. The pharaoh owned Egypt's mines and quarries and the trading fleets that sailed to foreign lands. Foreign merchants had to deal with royal officials, not with the merchants of Egypt.

Many officials were appointed to supervise the details of the government. The most important was the vizier, also known as the Chief Overseer (he was like a Prime Minister) His job was to carry out the orders and decisions of the pharaoh, and he acted as a diplomat in the royal court, was in charge of tax collection and public works.

Under the vizier were the governors who controlled the local estates into which Egypt was divided. Beneath the governors were the scribes and overseers. The scribes were the keepers of the records. The overseers supervised the farming of the land, and the peasants. Government and religion were inseparable in Egypt.

**Entertainment**

Egyptians spent their spare time doing a wide variety of things, and many of these activities are shown on the tomb walls. Dramatizations were held in the temples, but the most important source of entertainment & relaxation was the Nile River. Activities on the river include fishing, river boat outings, swimming, hunting crocodiles and hippopotamuses, and boat games where two teams of men in boats with long poles, would try to push each other into the water. Hunting in the desert was another great pastime, especially for the noblemen. Men first hunted on foot; however, by the time of the New Kingdom, men used horses and chariots.

Some of the animals the Ancient Egyptians hunted include the fox, hare, and hyena. Wealthy Egyptians often entertained by holding extravagant parties with plenty of food to eat and beer and wine to drink. Singers, dancers, acrobats, and musicians were hired to entertain. The Egyptians loved music, and played instruments such as the lute, harp, and lyre. Other favorite pastimes included board games like Hounds & Jackals, and Senet. Children kept themselves entertained with toys like carved ivory animals, wooden horses on wheels, and balls. Festivals held in Ancient Egypt were usually holidays in honor of the gods. The important gods had festivals in their honor that were held by the priests. A statue of the god was carried through the streets.

**By Alyssa Fitzgerald** *Source: Splendors of Ancient Egypt Educational Guide*

Egypt

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| Arguments in favor of living in Egypt. | Supporting evidence or claims. |
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Egypt

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| Arguments against living in Egypt. | Supporting evidence or claims. |
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**Persia**

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| Arguments in favor of living in Persia. | Supporting evidence or claims. |
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**Persia**

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| Arguments against living in Persia. | Supporting evidence or claims. |
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 Develop Your Own Questions

Directions: Based on the reading and your observations, design your own questionnaire. These questions might help you in developing source evidence and think about what the reader is wondering while reading your essay.

Egypt

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