History of Horticulture: Lectures 6–8

Lectures 6–8
Ancient Egyptian Agriculture and the Origins of Horticulture

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<td>Saite, Late Period (XXVI)</td>
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The great sphinx and pyramids at Giza

Pyramids at Giza
The sarcophagus of King Tut Ankh Amun encrusted with gold and semiprecious stones

The Sun Boat Model in the Special Museum at Giza

A barge carrying agricultural products in the Nile. Egypt is the gift of the Nile (Herodotus 484–425 BCE, Greek historian)

Source: J. Janick photo.

Diorite head of the Pharaoh Khafre 4th Dynasty Reigned 2558–2532 BCE

Source: Durant, Our Oriental Heritage.
Painted limestone head of Ikhnaton’s Queen Nofretete ca. 1370–1330 BCE

Source: Durant, Our Oriental Heritage.

The Rosetta Stone

Source: Durant, Our Oriental Heritage.

Plants as Symbols
Papyrus and lotus symbols of upper and lower Egypt

Hunting scene showing lotus and papyrus
Offering of lotus and papyrus to Isis
Intertwining of lotus and papyrus symbolizing the reunification of upper and lower Egypt

Source: Cairo museum, J. Janick photo
Source: Throne of Semusert I, 1900 BCE, Singer et al., 1954

The unification of upper and lower Egypt was celebrated by the design of a new crown fusing the design of each

Source: J. Janick photo.

The Temple of Khnum (Kom Ombo), at Esna showing columns representing papyrus and lotus

Source: J. Janick photo
The Temple of Khnum (Kom Ombo), at Esna showing columns representing papyrus and lotus

Source: J. Janick photo

Cat watching his prey
A wall-painting in the grave of Khnumhotep at Beni-Hasan

Source: Durant, Our Oriental Heritage

Different representations of plants

Profound, too, was the myth of Isis, the Great Mother. She was not only the loyal sister and wife of Osiris; in a sense she was greater than he, for—like woman in general she had conquered death through love.

Nor was she merely the black soil of the Delta, fertilized by the touch of Osiris–Nile, and making all Egypt rich with her fecundity.

She was, above all, the symbol of that mysterious creative power which had produced the earth and every living thing, and of that maternal tenderness whereby, at whatever cost to the mother, the young new life is nurtured to maturity.

She represented in Egypt—as Kali, Ishtar and Cybele represented in Asia, Demeter in Greece, and Ceres in Rome—the original priority and independence of the female principle in creation and in inheritance, and the originate leadership of woman in tilling the earth; for it was Isis (said the myth) who had discovered wheat and barley growing wild in Egypt, and had revealed them to Osiris (man).
The Egyptians worshiped her with especial fondness and piety, and raised up jeweled images to her as the Mother of God; her tonsured priests praised her in sonorous matins and vespers; and in midwinter of each year, coincident with the annual rebirth of the sun towards the end of our December, the temples of her divine child, Horus (god of the sun), showed her, in holy effigy, nursing in a stable the babe that she had miraculously conceived.

These poetic-philosophic legends and symbols profoundly affected Christian ritual and theology. Early Christians sometimes worshiped before the statues of Isis suckling the infant Horus, seeing in them another form of the ancient and noble myth by which woman (i.e., the female principle), creating all things, becomes at last the Mother of God.

Isis suckling her sun Horus, later depicted as a falcon-headed god. Isis later became a cult figure and was worshiped as a female deity.

Egyptian theology has a strong influence on subsequent religious practices of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Agriculture

Behind these kings and queens were pawns; behind these temples, palaces and pyramids were the workers of the cities and peasants of the fields. The population of Egypt in the fourth century before Christ is estimated at some 7,000,000 souls. Herodotus describes them optimistically as he found them about 450 BCE:
They gather in the fruits of the earth with less labor than any other people, ... for they have not the toil of breaking up the furrow with the plough, nor of hoeing, nor of any other work which all other men must labor at to obtain a crop of corn; but when the river has come of its own accord and irrigated their fields, and having irrigated them has subsided, then each man sows his own land and turns his swine into it; and when the seed has been trodden into it by the swine he waits for harvest time; then ... he gathers it in.

As the swine trod in the seed, so apes were tamed and taught to pluck fruit from the trees.

And the same Nile that irrigated the fields deposited upon them, in its inundation, thousands of fish in shallow pools; even the same net with which the peasant fished during the day was used around his head at night as a double protection against mosquitoes.

Nevertheless it was not he who profited by the bounty of the river.

Every acre of the soil belonged to the Pharaoh, and other men could use it only by his kind indulgence; every tiller of the earth had to pay him an annual tax of ten or twenty percent in kind.

Large tracts were owned by the feudal barons or other wealthy men; the size of some of these estates may be judged from the circumstance that one of them had 1500 cows. Cereals, fish and meat were the chief items of diet.

One fragment tells the school-boy what he is permitted to eat; it includes 33 forms of the flesh, 48 baked meats, and 24 varieties of drink.

The rich washed down their meals with wine, the poor with barley beer. The lot of the peasant was hard.

The “free” farmer was subject daily to the middleman and the tax-collector, who dealt with him on the most time-honored of economic principles, taking “all that the traffic would bear” out of the produce of the land.
Here is how a complacent contemporary scribe conceived the life of the men who fed ancient Egypt:

Dost thou not recall the picture of the farmer when the tenth of his grain is levied?

Worms have destroyed half the wheat, and the hippopotami have eaten the rest; there are swarms of rats in the fields, the grasshoppers alight there, the cattle devour, the little birds piffer; and if the farmer loses sight for an instant of what remains on the ground, it is carried off by robbers; moreover, the thongs which bind the iron and the hoe are worn out, and the team has died at the plough.

It is then that the scribe steps out of the boat at the landing-place to levy the tithe, and there come the Keepers of the Doors of the (King’s) Granary with cudgels, and Negroes with ribs of palm-leaves, crying, “Come now, come!”

There is none, and they throw the cultivator full length upon the ground, bind him, drag him to the canal, and fling him in head first; his wife is bound with him, his children are put into chains. The neighbors in the meantime leave him and fly to save their grain.

It is a characteristic bit of literary exaggeration; but the author might have added that the peasant was subject at any time to the corvée, doing forced labor for the King, dredging the canals, building roads, tilling the royal lands, or dragging great stones and obelisks for pyramids, temples, and palaces.

Probably a majority of the laborers in the field were moderately content, accepting their poverty patiently.

Many of them were slaves, captured in the wars or bonded for debt; sometimes slave-raids were organized, and women and children from abroad were sold to the highest bidder at home.
An old relief in the Leyden Museum pictures a long procession of Asiatic captives passing gloomily into the land of bondage: one sees them still alive on that vivid stone, their hands tied behind their backs or their heads, or thrust through rude handcuffs of wood; their faces empty with the apathy that has known the last despair.

### Egyptian Grains

Barley

Wheat

- Einkorn (AA)
- Emmer (AABB)
- Durum (AABB)
- Spelt (AABBD)
- Bread (AABBD)

### Egyptian Vegetables

- Alliums: garlic, onion
- Cucurbits: melon, watermelon
- Crucifers: radish
- Lettuce
- Parsley
- Pulses (legume crops): cowpea, fava bean, chickpea, lentil
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Scientific name</th>
<th>Earliest record</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
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<td>Date palm</td>
<td>Phoenix dactylifera</td>
<td>Pre-dynastic</td>
<td>Archeological</td>
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<tr>
<td>Doum palm</td>
<td>Hyphaene thebaica</td>
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<td>Syrian fig</td>
<td>Ficus sycomorus</td>
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<td>Jujube</td>
<td>Zizyphus spina-Christi</td>
<td>I (Old Kingdom)</td>
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<td>Fig</td>
<td>Ficus carica</td>
<td>II (Old Kingdom)</td>
<td>Archeological</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grape</td>
<td>Vitis vinifera</td>
<td>II (Old Kingdom)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hog plum</td>
<td>Balanites aegyptiaca</td>
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<tr>
<td>Persian lemon</td>
<td>Melia azedarach</td>
<td>III (Old Kingdom)</td>
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<td>Argan palm</td>
<td>Medicago argen</td>
<td>III (Old Kingdom)</td>
<td>Archeological</td>
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<td>Carob</td>
<td>Ceratonia siliqua</td>
<td>XII (Middle Kingdom)</td>
<td>Archeological</td>
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<td>Pomegranate</td>
<td>Punica granatum</td>
<td>XII (Middle Kingdom)</td>
<td>Archeological</td>
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<td>Egyptian plum</td>
<td>Cordia myxa</td>
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<td>Olive</td>
<td>Olea europaea</td>
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<td>Malus domestica</td>
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<td>Peach</td>
<td>Prunus persica</td>
<td>Graeco-Roman</td>
<td>Archeological</td>
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<td>Pear</td>
<td>Pyrus communis</td>
<td>Graeco-Roman</td>
<td>Archeological</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cherry</td>
<td>Prunus avium; P. cerasus</td>
<td>5 BCE</td>
<td>Literacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Citrus</td>
<td>Citrus medica</td>
<td>2nd century CE</td>
<td>Literacy</td>
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Preparing the flax, beating it, and making it into twine and cloth

1 Brings water in earthen pots
4,5 Engaged in beating it with mallets
7,8 Striking it, after it is made into yarn, on a stone
9,10 Twisting the yarn into a rope
11,12 Show that a piece of cloth has been made of the yarn
13 A superintendent


Women weaving and using the spindle

A piece of cloth on a frame (top) a loom (bottom)


Men engaged in spinning, and making a sort of network (top) The horizontal loom, or perhaps mat-making (bottom)


The mummification process was a magico-religious act to prepare the body as a fit receptacle for the returning soul. Decomposition of the fleshy parts were first stopped by (1) removal of brain and abdominal and thoracic viscera, except heart and kidneys, (2) cleaning the viscera with palm-wine and spices, (3) filling the body-cavities with myrrh, cassia, and other aromatic substances, and sewing up the embalming incision, (4) treating the body with natron (sodium carbonate) and washing it, (5) anointing it with cedar-oil and other ointments rubbing it with fragrant materials, and wrapping it in bandages.

Development of the Hoe

(Top) Primitive hoe cut from a forked branch.
(Bottom) A more developed form with hafted wooden blade. Both Middle Kingdom 2375–1800 BCE.

Soil preparation by hoeing; from a Tomb at Ti at Saqqara, ca. 2400 BCE.

Source: Singer et al., 1954.

Cultivation Technology

Plowing and Hoeing
from a tomb at Beni Hasan, ca. 1900 BCE

Source: Singer et al., 1954.

Land Reclamation

Trees are being cut in land clearing; clods are broken with mallets, soil is plowed, seed is sown on prepared ground.

Note ladder like cross pieces on plow handle and shaft bound to a double yoke over the oxen horns.

Source: Singer et al., 1954.
Note ladder like cross pieces on plow handle and shaft bound to a double yoke over the oxen horns.


Cultivation, Hoeing, and Plowing

Chariot with Umbrella


Seed is treads by sheep driven across a field.
The sower offers them a handful of grain to lure them on while another drives them with a whip.

Source: Singer et al., 1954.
They gather in the fruits of the earth with less labor than any other people, … for they have not the toil of breaking up the furrow with the plough, nor of hoeing, nor of any other work which all other men must labor at to obtain a crop of corn; but when the river has come of its own accord and irrigated their fields, and having irrigated them has subsided, then each man sows his own land and turns his swine into it; and when the seed has been trodden into it by the swine he waits for harvest time; then … he gathers in it.
Irrigating and harvesting in a vegetable garden. Gardeners carry pots attached to a yoke and pour water into checkerboard furrows; another ties onions into bundles. Source: Singer et al., 1954.

Irrigation Technology (Beni Hasan, ca. 1900 BCE)

A contemporary scene of garden irrigation in Sumatra. Cabbage is being grown for shipment to Singapore. Source: J. Janick photo.

Irrigation Technology: The Shaduf (Thebes ca. 1500 BCE)

Irrigation of a palm orchard by a shaduf, using a water-lifting device consisting of a beam holding a long pole in which a bucket is suspended at one end and a large lump of clay acts as a counterpoise. The water is funneled to a mud basin at the foot of the palm. Source: Singer et al., 1954.
Irrigation of a garden by means of a row of shadufs. Lotus grows in the pools and papyrus at their edges.


Modern shaduf, or pole and bucket, used for raising water, in Upper and Lower Egypt.


Present day garden at Neve Firan, Sinai showing irrigation channels.

Source: J. Janick photo.
Date palm with water storage pond in a distorted perspective.

Surveyors measuring a field, probably to determine tax.
Source: Singer et al., 1954.

Oath taken on a boundary stone:
I swear by the great god that is in heaven that the right boundary stone has been set up.
Source: Singer et al., 1954.
Putting the seed into the basket (left). Sowing the land after the plow has passed (right). Note the handle of the plow has a peg at the side like the modern Egyptian plow.

Plowing, sowing, and reaping. Plucking up the doora by the roots (left). Reaping wheat (right).


Harvesting and Handling Grain

Reaping grain and tying sheaves. Tomb at Mena at Thebes, ca. 1420 BCE.

Source: Darby et al., 1976.

Gathering the doora and wheat

1) Plucking up the plant by the roots
2) Striking off the earth from the roots
3) Reaping wheat

Wheat bound in sheaves

1) Reaping
2) Carrying the ears
3) Binding in sheaves


Gathering the Doora, and stripping off the grain

1) Woman plucking up the plant by the roots.
2) Striking off the earth from the roots after it is plucked up.
3) Binding it into a sheaf.
4) Carrying it to the area.
5) Stripping off the grain by drawing the head forcibly through an instrument furnished with medal spikes for this purpose.


Harvesting and Handling Grain
(Saqqara, ca. 2400 BCE)

Harvesting wheat in Old Kingdom.
Heads are bound into sheaves and loaded onto donkeys.

Source: Singer et al. 1954.
Reaping wheat in New Kingdom. Heads are cut short and cast into a large net. 
Source: Singer et al., 1954.

Harvesting and Handling Grain
(Thebes ca. 1420 BCE)

1) The steward, or the owner of the land.
2) Throws the ears of wheat into the centre, that the oxen may pass over them and tread out the grain.
3) The driver.
4) Brings the wheat to the threshing-floor in baskets carried on asses.
The oxen are yoked together, that they may walk round regularly. 

Threshing

Oxen threshing grain.
Tomb of Mena at Thebes ca. 1420 BCE.
Source: Darby et al., 1976.
(Above) Winnowing grain by tossing the grain into the air with wooden scoops.
(Below) Husked grain is measured in bushels before storage.

Source: Singer et al., 1954.

Harvest Scene

1) The reapers
2) A reaper drinking from a cup
3) A reaper stretching and the reaper to allow him to drink.
4) A reaper: the first of these asks the reaper to allow him to drink.
5) Carrying the ears in a rope basket: the length of the stubble showing the ears alone are cut off
6) Winnowing
8) The tritura, or truddling of grain
9) A man drinking from a water skin suspended in a tree
10) Scribe who notes down the number of bushels measured from the heap
10) Checks the account by noting those taken away to the granary


Rooms for housing the grain, apparently vaulted

Note scribe and driver with whip  
From a tomb at Beni Hasan, Egypt ca. 1900 BCE  
Source: Singer et al., 1954.

Workers carry grain into silos while scribes register the amount.  
Tomb of Antefoker at Thebes, Middle Kingdom.  
Source: Darby et al., 1976.

A scribe checks the storing of raisins  
Source: Singer et al., 1954.
**Processing Grain**

- Grinding wheat in a saddle-quern ca. 2500 BCE
  
  Source: Singer et al. 1954.

- A bakery in Rameses III’s tomb at Thebes showing cakes of various shapes
  
  Source: Darby et al., 1976.

**Harvesting Fruit Crops**

- Gathering figs in shallow baskets while tame baboons cavort in the tree.
  
  From a tomb at Beni Hasan, Egypt, ca. 1900 BCE.
  
  Source: Singer et al., 1954.

**Harvesting Fruit Crops and Flax**

- A worker harvests pomegranates while a boy chases away a bird with a slingshot.
  
  Source: Singer et al., 1954.

- Harvesting and binding flax in sheaves.
  
  From the tomb of Hetepet, Old Kingdom.
  
Harvesting Fruit from Trellis and Free-standing Trees

The round arbor was a favorite training system for grapes.

Grape Harvest and Training

Grapes are collected from a round arbor and workers crush grapes by stomping while balancing on cords hanging from a frame. Wine is stored in amphorae.


Source: Singer et al., 1954.
Large footpress; the amphorae; and the asp, or Agathodaemon, the protecting deity of the store-room


Wine Manufacture and Registration

Late Pharaonic–Ptolemaic period, Tomb of Petosiris

Source: Darby et al., 1976.

Wine Making: Grape Pressing

Working an Egyptian bag-press.
From a tomb at Saqqara, Egypt ca. 2500 BCE.

Source: Singer et al. 1954. A History of Technology Fig. 186.
Early Egyptian bag press where the bag is squeezed by poles.

From a tomb at Saqqara, ca. 2500 BCE.

Source: Darby et al., 1976, Fig. 14.4.

Wine Making: Grape Pressing

Expressing juice of grapes by twisting a bag press in which the ends are held apart in a frame.

An inspector tests the cloth for holes.

Source: Darby et al., 1976.

Wine Making: Grape Pressing
(Beni Hasan, ca. 1500 BCE)

A modern juice extraction machine showing the same principle as the previous figures.
A modern continuous cider machine that operates by squeezing fruit in a cloth press

Wine Making
(From a mural in the palace of Thebes of the reign of Amenopsis II, 1450–1425 BCE)

Preparation of wine showing both foot pressing and a bag press.

Source: Gaser and Nurock, 1968.

Storing Wine
Wine jars found in the tomb of Tut-Ankh-Amon.

The lid bears the stamp of the Pharaoh.
(Right) Note safety opening made in the lid to allow gases out, later closed with a plug of clay.

Source: Darby et al., 1976.
Mixing wines by siphoning, perhaps at a banquet.
Source: Darby et al., 1976.

Offering wine to a guest

Men carried home from drinking
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A servant called to support her mistress

Perfume and Cosmetics

A visual representation of the fragrance from essential oils being extracted from an herb.
Source: J. Janick photo.

Cover of alabaster Canopic Vase in tomb of Tut-Ankh-Amon. Note lipstick and painted eyes.
Source: J. Janick photo.

Perfume and Cosmetics

Gathering lilies for their perfume.
Source: Singer et al., 1954, Fig. 189.

Contemporary picture of students harvesting peaches.
Source: R. Hayden photo.
**Perfume and Cosmetics**

Expressing oil of lily

Source: Singer et al., 1954.

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**Compounding Ointments and Perfumes (Thebes 1500 BCE)**

Assistants crush dried herbs with pestle and mortar (1,2,3,4).
The crushed herbs are added to a bowl of molten fat, stirred (5) and shaped into balls upon cooling (6).
Special jars probably containing spiced wine, a useful solvent because of its alcohol content is siphoned and filtered into a bowl (7).
At extreme left an assistant shapes a piece of wood beneath a bowl heaped with unguents (8).

Source: Singer et al., 1954.

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**Plant Exploration (ca 2000 BCE)**

An epistle in which the Egyptian scribe Sinuhe penned the following description about Yaa, the name for Israel.

*It was a goodly land called Yaa Figs were in it and grapes, and its wine was more abundant than its water. Plentiful was its honey, many were its olives; all manner of fruits were upon its trees.*

Source: Goor and Nurock, 1968.
Hatshepsut, the only woman to rule of Egypt as Pharaoh, names her temple “Djeser, Djeseru,” the Splendor of Splendors.

Source: J. Janick photo.

Hatshepsut’s Temple (El-Deir El-Bahari)

Close up of Queen Hatshepsut

Note false beard, symbol of Pharaohs

Source: J. Janick photo.

Plant Exploration

Ships of Queen Hatshepsut’s fleet landing at Punt (northeastern coast of Africa) with exotic merchandise for Egypt. Deir el-Bahri, ca. 1500 BCE.

Note tame baboons, marine character of fish, the carting and storage of incense plants.

Source: Singer et al., 1954.
Strange plants and seeds brought back from Syria by Thothmes II, as they were carved on the walls of the temple of Karnak, Egypt, ca. 1450 BCE. 

Source: Singer et al., 1954.

Oasis at El Tor, Sinai peninsula

Source: J. Janick, photo.

Randomly-placed trees within a square enclosure surrounding square pool. Carving from the tomb of Akhnaton (18th dynasty).

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Ancient Egyptian Garden Scenes

Four workers transporting trees.
Source: Wright, 1934.

Tree with earth raised around the roots.

Ancient Egyptian Garden Scenes

Harvesting pomegranates in formal planting interspersed with ornamental columns next to a T-shaped pool.

Ancient Egyptian Garden Scenes
(Thebes, ca. 1300 BCE)

Garden planted with fig, olive trees and flowering plants containing a pavilion with steps leading down to the water, being irrigated by a row of shadufs.
Source: Singer et al., 1954.
The lotus pool, on which statue of the vizier Rekhmire is being towed by boat, faces a pavilion or summerhouse. Around the pool grow doum palms, date palms, acacias, and other trees and shrubs. Source: Singer et al., 1954.

Formal Egyptian garden (Thebes ca. 1450 BCE)


A Complete Egyptian Temple

Note two types of palms: single trunk = date palm, bifurcated trunk = doum palm.
Source: Berrall, 1966.

Tomb painting of an Egyptian garden

Villa, with obelisks and towers, like a temple
A noble couple, surrounded by farm scenes give thanks for the harvest by anointing an array of fruit, vegetables, bread, and meat.