The main geographical feature of ancient Egypt was the Nile River. It runs the entire length of the ancient Egyptian landscape and is formed by three main rivers - the Blue Nile from the mountains of Ethiopia, the White Nile from the mountains in Uganda and the Atbara River.

There were three distinct seasons of the year tied to the Nile River. The first was the Season of Inundation or *Akhet* between June and September. During this time the river flooded. Egyptian farmers would assist Pharaohs in constructing monuments. They would also tend to their livestock and prepare tools for ploughing and harvesting.

During the Season of Emergence or *Peret* between October and February the waters would recede leaving behind a rich fertile black silt perfect for ploughing and sowing crops. The main crops planted included wheat and barley grown to produce bread and beer. Farmers also grew leeks, onions, lettuce, cucumbers, and fruits such as grapes, figs and dates. Bees were kept to make honey and the mud from the receding river was used to make bricks for housing.

Finally the Season of Drought or *Shemu* between March and June would be a time when crops would be harvested, grains threshed and food stored in granaries. The government collected taxes and conducted census at this time. The Nile was therefore vital in providing food and water supplies.

It also created two distinct geographical regions. The ancient Egyptians never referred to their land as Egypt. Instead one name they gave Egypt was Kemet or Black Land. This referred to the narrow fertile valley either side of the river and the Delta region. Deshut or Red Land referred to the desert and cliff regions making up the rest of ancient Egypt.

The Nile River was also a vital means of transport and communication for the empire. As the river flowed towards the Mediterranean Sea, ships journeyed north using oarsmen and the current. Travelling south against the current required ships to use sails. They could utilise a wind which generally flowed from the north to the south.

The Nile also had papyrus plants growing along its banks. The plant was used to make paper, mats, sandals, baskets and boats. Herodotus summed up the importance of the river system by calling Egypt the ‘gift of the Nile’.
The flow of the Nile River also accounted for the second name ancient Egyptians gave to their land - ‘The Two Lands’ or tawy. The southern region of Egypt was called Upper Egypt because the Nile originated from here. It stretched from Aswan to Memphis and was characterised by a dry and hot climate, limited agricultural land and an abundance of building materials. Limestone, sandstone and granite were extracted from the cliffs along the river with the main stone quarries located at Aswan. The desert region in the east provided natron and metals such as copper and gold.

The northern region was called Lower Egypt and consisted of the Nile Delta and the tributaries which ran into the Mediterranean Sea. It was characterised by a mild and moist climate, fertile land and abundant papyrus plants and wildlife. Here duck and wild fowl were hunted and carp and tilapia fish caught.

Egypt did however lack a few valuable natural resources which had to be acquired through trade or war. Timber needed for constructing furniture, ships and buildings had to be obtained via trade with Retjenu or Syria-Palestine. Oil had to be imported from Mediterranean locations such as Crete. Nubia was an important region in that it provided Egypt with valuable gold reserves and access to incense, animal skins and ostrich feathers.