

The Old Kingdom

If YOU were there...

You are a peasant farmer in ancient Egypt. To you, the pharaoh is a god, a descendent of the sun god, Re. You depend on his strength and wisdom. For part of the year, you are busy planting crops in your fields. But at other times, you work for the pharaoh. You are currently helping to build a great tomb in which the pharaoh and many of his belongings will be buried when he dies.

How do you feel about working for the pharaoh?

What You Will Learn...

Main Ideas

1. In early Egyptian society, pharaohs ruled as gods and were at the top of the social structure.
2. Religion shaped Egyptian life.
3. The pyramids of Egypt were built as tombs for the pharaohs.

The Big Idea

Egyptian government and religion were closely connected during the Old Kingdom.

Key Terms and People

Old Kingdom, p. 90

Khufu, p. 91

nobles, p. 91

afterlife, p. 92

mummies, p. 93

elite, p. 93

pyramids, p. 94

engineering, p. 94



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TAKING NOTES

Use the graphic organizer online to take notes on government and religion in the Old Kingdom.

BUILDING BACKGROUND As in other ancient cultures, Egyptian society was based on a strict order of social classes. A small group of royalty, nobles, and priests ruled Egypt. They depended on the rest of the population to supply foods, crafts, and labor. Few people questioned this arrangement of society.

Early Egyptian Society

The First and Second Dynasties ruled Egypt for about four centuries. Around 2700 BC, the Third Dynasty rose to power. Its rule began the **Old Kingdom**, a period in Egyptian history that lasted from about 2700 BC to 2200 BC.

Rule by Pharaohs

During the Old Kingdom, the Egyptians continued to develop their political system. This system was based on the belief that the pharaoh was both a king and a god.

The ancient Egyptians believed that Egypt belonged to the gods. They believed that the pharaoh had come to earth to manage Egypt for the rest of the gods. As a result, he had absolute power over all the land and people in Egypt. But the pharaoh's status as a god came with many responsibilities. People blamed him if crops did not grow well or if disease struck. They also demanded that the pharaoh make trade profitable and prevent wars.

During the Old Kingdom, the duties of the pharaohs grew. To help carry out these duties, the pharaohs hired government officials. Most officials came from the pharaoh's family.

The most famous pharaoh of the Old Kingdom was **Khufu** (KOO-foo), who ruled in the 2500s BC. Egyptian legend says that he was cruel, but historical records tell us that the people who worked for him were well fed. Khufu is best known for the monuments that were built to him.

The Social Structure

By 2200 BC, Egypt had about 2 million people. At the top of Egyptian society was the pharaoh. Just below him were the upper classes, which included priests and key government officials. Many of these priests and officials were **nobles, or people from rich and powerful families.**

Below the nobles was a middle class of lesser government officials, scribes, craftspeople, and merchants. Egypt's lower class, about 80 percent of the population, was made up mostly of farmers. During flood season, when they could not work the

fields, farmers worked on the pharaoh's building projects. Below farmers in the social order were slaves and servants.

Egypt and Its Neighbors

Although well-protected by its geography, Egypt was not isolated. Other cultures had influenced it for centuries. For example, Sumerian designs are found in Egyptian art. Egyptian pottery also reflects styles from Nubia, a region south of Egypt.

During the Old Kingdom, Egypt began trading with its neighbors. Traders returned from Nubia with gold, ivory, slaves, and stone. Traders traveled to Punt, an area on the Red Sea, to **acquire** incense and myrrh (MUHR). These two items were used to make perfume and medicine. Trade with Syria provided Egypt with wood.

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY
acquire (uh-KWYR)
 to get

READING CHECK **Generalizing** How was society structured in the Old Kingdom?

Egyptian Society

Pharaoh

The pharaoh ruled Egypt as a god.



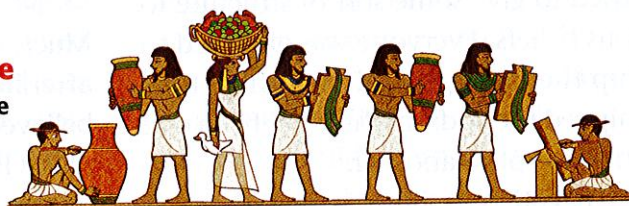
Nobles

Officials and priests helped run the government and temples.



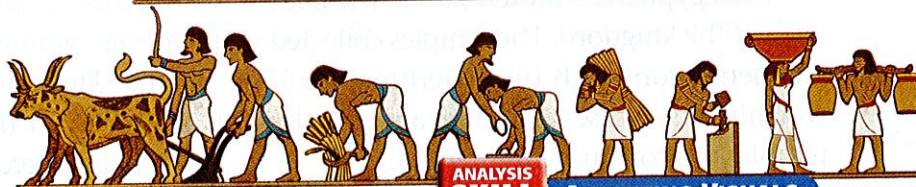
Scribes and Craftspeople

Scribes wrote and craftspeople produced goods.



Farmers, Servants, and Slaves

Most Egyptians were farmers. Below them were servants and slaves.



ANALYSIS SKILL

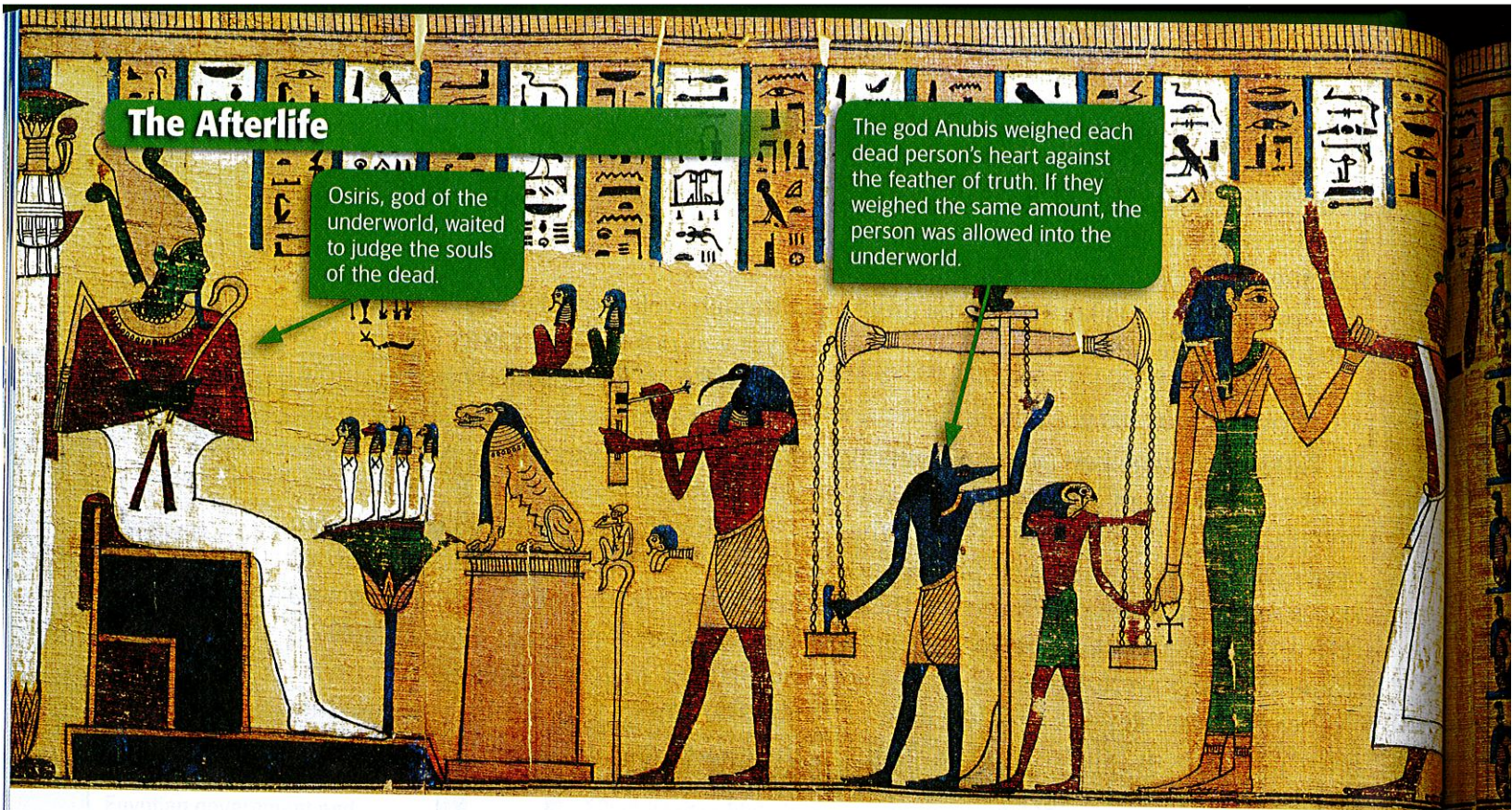
ANALYZING VISUALS

Which group helped run the government and temples?

The Afterlife

Osiris, god of the underworld, waited to judge the souls of the dead.

The god Anubis weighed each dead person's heart against the feather of truth. If they weighed the same amount, the person was allowed into the underworld.



Religion and Egyptian Life

The ancient Egyptians had strong religious beliefs. Worshipping the gods was a part of their everyday lives. Many Egyptian religious customs focused on what happened after people died.

The Gods of Egypt

Like Mesopotamians, Egyptians practiced polytheism. Before the First Dynasty, each village worshipped its own gods. During the Old Kingdom, however, Egyptian officials tried to give some sort of structure to religious beliefs. Everyone was expected to worship the same gods, though how they worshipped the gods might differ from one region of Egypt to another.

The Egyptians built temples to the gods all over the kingdom. The temples collected payments from both the government and worshippers. These payments allowed the temples to grow more influential.

Over time, certain cities became centers for the worship of certain gods. In

Memphis, for example, people prayed to Ptah, the creator of the world.

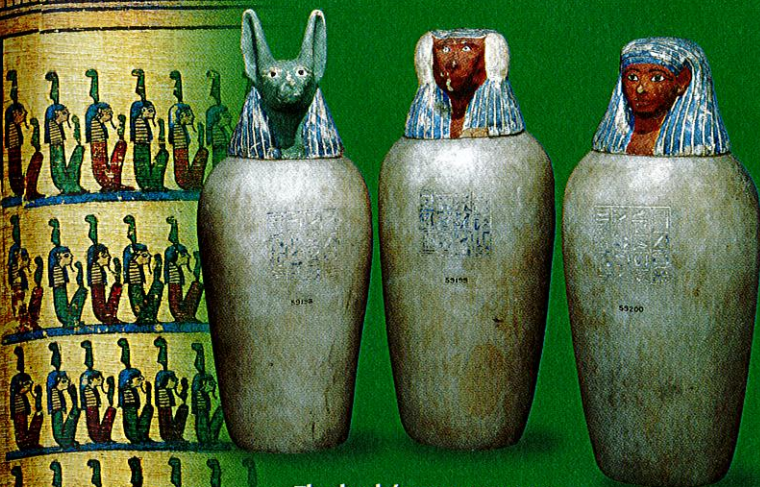
The Egyptians had gods for nearly everything, including the sun, the sky, and the earth. Many gods mixed human and animal forms. For example, Anubis, the god of the dead, had a human body but a jackal's head. Other major gods included

- Re, or Amon-Re, the sun god
- Osiris, the god of the underworld
- Isis, the goddess of magic, and
- Horus, a sky god, god of the pharaohs

Emphasis on the Afterlife

Much of Egyptian religion focused on the **afterlife**, or **life after death**. The Egyptians believed that the afterlife was a happy place. Paintings from Egyptian tombs show the afterlife as an ideal world where all the people are young and healthy.

The Egyptian belief in the afterlife stemmed from their idea of *ka* (KAH), or a person's life force. When a person died, his or her *ka* left the body and became a spirit. The *ka*, however, remained linked to the



The body's organs were preserved in special jars and kept next to the mummy.



The body was preserved as a mummy and kept in a case called a sarcophagus.

ANALYSIS SKILL ANALYZING VISUALS

According to Egyptian beliefs, how did gods participate in the afterlife?

body and could not leave its burial site. The *ka* had all the same needs that the person had when he or she was living.

To fulfill the *ka's* needs, people filled tombs with objects for the afterlife. These objects included furniture, clothing, tools, jewelry, and weapons. Relatives of the dead were expected to bring food and beverages to their loved ones' tombs so the *ka* would not be hungry or thirsty.

Burial Practices

Egyptian ideas about the afterlife shaped their burial practices. Egyptians believed that a body had to be prepared for the afterlife before it could be buried. This meant the body had to be preserved. If the body decayed, its spirit could not recognize it. That would break the link between the body and spirit. The *ka* would then be unable to receive the food and drink it needed to have a good afterlife.

To keep the *ka* from suffering, the Egyptians developed a **method** called

embalming. Embalming allowed bodies to be preserved for many, many years as **mummies**, specially treated bodies wrapped in cloth. A body that was not embalmed would decay quickly.

Embalming was a complex process that took several weeks. When finished, embalmers wrapped the body with linen cloths and bandages. The mummy was then placed in a coffin. Relatives often wrote magic spells inside the coffin to help the mummy receive food and drink.

Only royalty and other members of Egypt's **elite** (AY-leet), or people of wealth and power, could afford to have mummies made. Peasant families buried their dead in shallow graves at the edge of the desert. The hot dry sand and lack of moisture preserved the bodies naturally.

READING CHECK Analyzing How did religious beliefs affect Egyptian burial practices?

H
HISTORY
VIDEO
Are Mummies Beef Jerky?
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ACADEMIC VOCABULARY
method
a way of doing something

The Pyramids

FOCUS ON READING

What group of words in this paragraph signals an effect?

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ANIMATED HISTORY

The Great Pyramid

Egyptians believed that burial sites, especially royal tombs, were very important. As a result, they built spectacular monuments in which to bury their rulers. The most spectacular of all were the **pyramids, huge stone tombs with four triangle-shaped walls that met in a point on top.**

The Egyptians began to build pyramids during the Old Kingdom. Some of the largest pyramids ever constructed were built during this time. Many of these huge

structures are still standing. The largest is the Great Pyramid of Khufu near the town of Giza. It covers more than 13 acres at its base and stands 481 feet high. This single pyramid took more than 2 million limestone blocks to build. Historians are still not sure exactly how Egyptians built the pyramids. They are, however, amazing feats of **engineering, the application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes.**

Burial in a pyramid demonstrated a pharaoh's importance. The size was a symbol

History Close-up

Building the Pyramids

More than 4,000 years ago, workers near Giza, Egypt, built three massive pyramids as tombs for their rulers. The amount of work this job required is hard to imagine. Tens of thousands of people must have worked for decades to build these gigantic structures. In this illustration, men work to build the pharaoh Khafre's pyramid.

A statue called a sphinx was carved out of rock and left to guard Khafre's tomb.

Giant ramps made of rubble were piled around the pyramid so workers could reach the top.

Huge blocks of limestone were cut with copper tools and taken by boat to the building site.

of the pharaoh's greatness. The pyramid's shape, pointing to the skies, symbolized the pharaoh's journey to the afterlife. The Egyptians wanted the pyramids to be spectacular because they believed that the pharaoh, as their link to the gods, controlled everyone's afterlife. Making the pharaoh's spirit happy was a way of ensuring a happy afterlife for every Egyptian.

READING CHECK Identifying Points of View

Why were pyramids so important to the people of ancient Egypt?

Teams of workers dragged the stones on wooden sleds to the pyramid.

ANALYSIS SKILL ANALYZING VISUALS

How did workers get their stone blocks to the pyramids?

SUMMARY AND PREVIEW During the Old Kingdom, new political and social orders were created in Egypt, and many of the pyramids were built. In Section 3, you will learn about life in later periods, the Middle and New Kingdoms.

Section 2 Assessment



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ONLINE QUIZ

Reviewing Ideas, Terms, and People

- a. **Recall** To what does the term **Old Kingdom** refer?

b. **Analyze** Why was the pharaoh's authority never questioned?

c. **Elaborate** How did trade benefit the Egyptians?
- a. **Describe** What did Egyptians mean by the **afterlife**?

b. **Analyze** Why was embalming important to the Egyptians?
- a. **Identify** What is **engineering**?

b. **Elaborate** What does the building of the **pyramids** tell us about Egyptian society?

Critical Thinking

- a. **Generalizing** Using your notes, complete this graphic organizer with three statements about the relationship between government and religion in the Old Kingdom.

Government and Religion

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

FOCUS ON WRITING

5. Noting Characteristics of the Old Kingdom

The Old Kingdom developed special characteristics related to religion and social structure. Write down any of those characteristics you might want to include in your riddle.