

## World History

Culture of Ancient Egypt (Reading 1 – Art)

Name:

Section:

Directions: You will become experts on one of the three strands of study of Ancient Egyptian Culture (Art, Religion, or Societal Structure). One completed with you reading and questions you will be paired with another student who had the same reading to check answers. You will then teach and learn about the other two subjects from students who had those readings.

### Art and Architecture of Ancient Egypt

Ancient Egypt is probably best known for its works of art and architecture. The building materials used, as well as the methods in which they were created, allowed them to withstand the natural forces that would have otherwise destroyed other structures. Egyptian buildings were primarily built out of bricks and stones since there were few forests nearby which could be collected, turned into lumber, and used for building materials. Limestone was primarily used since it could be easily quarried from the cliffs and hills along the edge of the Nile River. Sandstone was also heavily used, specifically for larger statues since it was easy to quarry and carve. Granite, Basalt, and Alabaster were used for ornamental pieces such as small statues, sarcophagi, and ornamental columns.

Poorer members of Egyptian society normally lived in houses made of sun dried bricks. Construction was fairly simple, and cheap, but the bricks were easily broken and did not last very long once they were put in place. A single family (normally consisting of up to 7 people) would inhabit a single house. Since wood was scarce and incredibly expensive many poor Egyptians did not have much in the means of furniture. Usually they had little more than brick cooking ovens and straw mats for beds. Houses were designed to stay cool in the hot Egyptian heat. Small windows were built to allow for breezes to flow through the house, but also to not allow in as much sun light. The ovens were outside to prevent having any extra heat in the house.

Temples and other government buildings were made of stone to ensure strength and stability. Many temples and government buildings still survive to this day, a testament to their strength and construction. Buildings in this category were normally larger, the more important the structure, the larger the structure tended to be. A temple to the main state god, for example, would be much larger than the temple for just a small regional deity. Importance of a structure was also emphasized by the artwork along the walls of the structure. Tombs were often decorated with hieroglyphs depicting important events in the person's life. Columns made of granite often stood along the doorways to important buildings, along with statues that acted as guardians.

Egyptian writing was done in a form called hieroglyphics. Hieroglyphics was a system of writing in which pictures took the place of sounds and letters. Pictures were also heavily used to depict important events in Egyptian history. Deciphering this complex system of writing was a long and arduous task until the armies of Napoleon happened upon a stone in 1799. The stone, dubbed the "Rosetta Stone", since it was found near the Egyptian city of Rosetta, contained a large amount of Egyptian text along with the Greek equivalent. The stone is dated 196 BCE, during the Ptolemaic period, so it is easy to see why it contains both Egyptian and Greek writing.

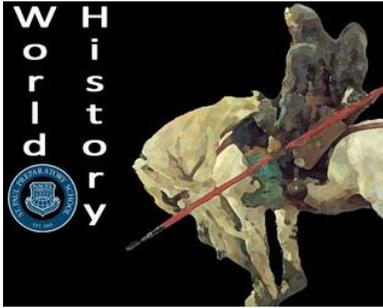


Pyramids are probably the largest legacy of the Egyptians. They were built in honor of Pharaohs to stand as lasting tributes to their reign. Pharaohs normally commissioned the construction of their tomb early in their reign, or their successor would commission the construction shortly after their predecessor's death. Pyramids were built using large blocks of limestone. Historians have only really been able to guess how the ancient Egyptians were able to build such massive structures, with such heavy blocks, using such primitive tools. The Great Pyramid at Giza, for example, required around 2.3 million blocks of limestone, each weighing around 2.5 tons. Construction of the pyramid took place over 20 years, during the reign of the Pharaoh Cheops. Once the pyramid was finished a layer of mortar was used to seal the stones in place and smooth out the sides to make a flat surface.

Statues were also an important part of Egyptian art. Statues of gods and Pharaohs were normally made to adorn the insides of temples and tombs. Historians have been able to learn a lot from the statues of the Pharaohs since they were made as likenesses so they are able to give us some idea of what the Pharaoh actually looked like. Statues of guardians, like the Great Sphinx, were also commissioned to serve as guardians for temples and tombs. Examples of guardian statues have often been found inside the burial chambers, of those who could afford them, as a guide through the afterlife.

Much about Egyptian art has been learned from the study of sarcophagi. Sarcophagi were much like modern day coffins, only they were made out of materials such as granite and even pure gold. The sarcophagi of the rulers are often lined with ornamental gold pieces to show the wealth and power of its inhabitant. Often the mummy inside would be adorned with gold and silver jewelry, as well as “magical” amulets to help them through the afterlife.

Archeologist, Anthropologist, Sociologist, Scientists, and Historians have been able to learn much about the ancient Egyptians through their artistic and Architectural artifacts that they left behind. In many cases the reason we may not know a whole lot about a specific Pharaoh or the significance of them is because grave robbers stole the artifacts before they could be properly studied and preserved. As archeologists continue to find more artifacts we learn more and more about the ancient Egyptians. We may never know the full history of the Ancient Egyptians, but at least we will know some of it, with the help of these artifacts.



## World History

Culture of Ancient Egypt (Reading 2 - Religion)

Name:

Section:

Directions: You will become experts on one of the three strands of study of Ancient Egyptian Culture (Art, Religion, or Societal Structure). One completed with you reading and questions you will be paired with another student who had the same reading to check answers. You will then teach and learn about the other two subjects from students who had those readings.

### Religious Practices of Ancient Egypt

The ancient Egyptians were a polytheistic (meaning they worshiped many gods) society. For the most part there was no one god that could have been considered the principle god of the Egyptians during the early dynasties. Each Nome had a provincial deity that was seen as the protector/provider for that Nome. An elaborate temple or shrine was built for the worship of each god. Where the temple was built primarily depended on which Nome held them in the highest regard, and had the resources available to build something in their god's honor. The different regions maintained their different deities along with the state god Amun-Ra. The sun god (Re, but sometimes referred to as Ra or Rah) and the wind god (Amun) were combined to form to create the official state god deity. The state god was changed many times depending on who the Pharaoh was at the time.

Gods were visualized as half man or women and half animal. Ra, for example had the body of a man, but then the head of a hawk. Cats were particularly seen as sacred in Egyptian society. The half cat/lion – half man combination (known as a Sphinx) was often used in Egyptian art and Architecture. The Great Sphinx of Giza stands at the foot of the Great Pyramid and is thought to be the guardian of the Great Pyramid. Many other animals, along with the hawk and cat, were used in the depiction of Egyptians gods such as crocodiles, wolves, jackals, and snakes. Different animals were used based on the different perceived characteristics of the god. Lions were strong and so they were used for the making of the guardian. Hawks flew in the sky so they were naturally connected with the sun god. Most of these gods stemmed back to the pre-dynastic period, but were maintained through the influence of the regional governments.

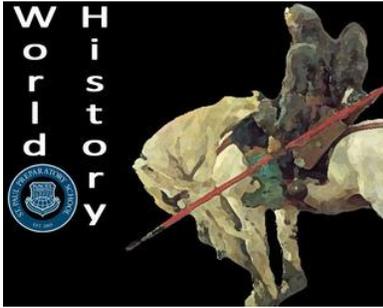
Ordinary people had little to no interaction with the gods. The Pharaoh was seen to be divinely selected to rule, and thus was given the means to communicate with the gods. Priests and servants were used to maintain the temples to the gods and see to the proper worship of the gods. Ordinary people were not allowed within the temples so all celebrations which ordinary people were allowed to attend had to be held on the temple grounds. The temples were designed like fortresses with very complex layouts. In the middle there were main chambers dedicated to the god. The statue of the temple's god was located in this main chamber.



The Priests were responsible for the worship of the gods. They did not perform duties with ordinary people. Priests were allowed to marry and have a family, but did not preach like modern day priests might. The jobs of the priest included the daily prayers and praises said to the gods as well as being responsible for the daily offerings made to the gods. Multiple priests may be assigned to a temple depending on the size of the temple and the importance of the god. Beyond the daily rituals that a priest was expected to carry out, they also were responsible for performing magic and praying to the gods in times of need. Priests also performed the burial rights for the wealthy and important individuals within Egyptian society.

The Egyptians believed in a life after death and went to great lengths to prepare their dead. Once a person died they would be buried along with their personal belongings, and their remaining loved ones would

enter into a period of mourning. Burials of commoners varied greatly from the elaborate burial procedures of the wealthy. Commoners were simply wrapped in a cloth and buried in a shallow grave along with a few possessions. The wealthy and powerful, however, were buried in as small of a structure as a simple tomb, to as large a structure as the Great Pyramid. As a general rule, the larger and more elaborate the tomb, the higher the status in society the person. Pyramids were exclusively reserved for Pharaohs. The bodies of the wealthy went through a much longer and laborious process to get them ready for burial than the poor. The bodies of the rich and wealthy were often embalmed, a process in which the organs would be removed, dried, and then buried along with the body. The hearts, however, were left in the bodies, since they were seen to be the keepers of the soul. The bodies were seen as the holders of the soul, even after death, so Egyptians went through great lengths to preserve the bodies to ensure the soul had a resting place. The bodies were cleaned, dried, filled with various materials to maintain their shape, and then wrapped in linens. After this procedure the bodies were adorned with jewelry and placed in a sarcophagus for burial. Food and other materials (such as the famous "Book of the dead") were placed in the tomb along with the bodies to help guide the person through the trials of the afterlife.



## World History

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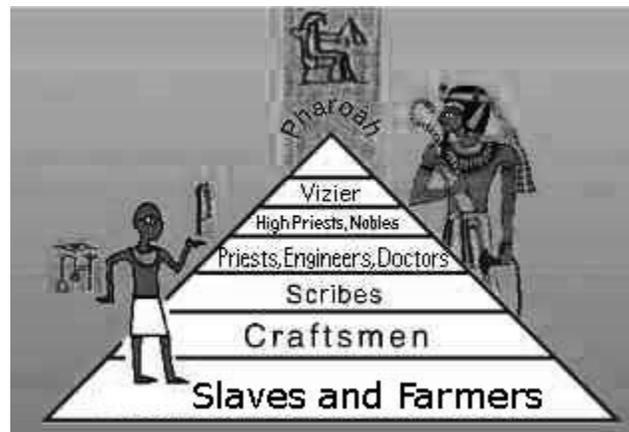
Culture of Ancient Egypt (Reading 3 – Social Structure) Section:

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Directions: You will become experts on one of the three strands of study of Ancient Egyptian Culture (Art, Religion, or Societal Structure). One completed with you reading and questions you will be paired with another student who had the same reading to check answers. You will then teach and learn about the other two subjects from students who had those readings.

### Societal Structure of Ancient Egypt

Egypt, like most empires, was built on the backs of its agricultural workers. Egypt is known for its Pharaohs and elaborate buildings, but its society was mainly comprised of poor farmers. Later, during the Middle Kingdom, a strong middle class would emerge. But until then the society was basically split up as the following graph shows. Mobility within the pyramid was somewhat difficult, especially the lower down in the pyramid you were.



At the bottom were the slaves and farmers. These were the people who were responsible for creating the wealth of Egypt. Farmers would be given a set amount of food that they would be allowed to keep for themselves and then regional tax collectors would take the rest. Farmers primarily grew wheat, barley, and flax. From these they were able to make bread, and beer which they would supplement with fruits, vegetables and fish. They were also responsible for tending flocks of geese, and herds of cattle and goats. Eating meat was rare for the lower classes since most was taken for taxes. Farmers were highly dependent of the Nile River for their livelihood. Once a year the Nile would flood and leave behind nutrient rich deposits that would fertilize the soil. Farms were almost always located close to the Nile river, if they were not then a system of irrigation canals would have to be built to connect them to the Nile. During the times they were not farming, the slaves and poor were used as manual labor for any one of the empires construction projects.

The Craftsmen and scribes were mainly responsible for the smooth running of the empire. Craftsmen were responsible for forming the many works of art and architecture across the empire. Craftsmen would include professions like stone masons, artists, and carpenters. Basically they were skilled laborers. The Scribes were responsible for recording documents on papyrus. Scribes were instrumental as tax collectors. They kept records of those under the rule of a particular Nomarch. Scribes and Craftsmen would be considered the bottom of the middle class since they lived somewhat modestly, garnered a good amount of respect, but then were not seen as elite members of society. They were normally well educated and were seen as an important piece in ensuring that the government ran smoothly.

The Priests, Engineers and Doctors were seen as the upper tier of the middle class. They were highly skilled and lived very well. Their positions in Egyptian society can easily be compared to their modern

equivalents. Families in this level of Egyptian society were sometimes rich and could afford “proper burials”, as well as other marks of the nobility.

The High Priests and nobles were very near to the top of Egyptian society. Nobles inherited their titles hereditarily. Nobles often would be in charge of the Nomes within Egyptian society and were often picked for political offices in the central government. Even though the Nobles were instrumental in the government, they had little to no influence in the central government. Since they were seen as the Elite in Egyptian society they had to follow a set of strict social codes, such as who they could marry, who they could be seen with, what they were expected to wear in public, and so on.

The High Priests were seen as the religious advisors to the Pharaohs, and appointed the Priests who would serve in the temples. Pharaohs would normally hand pick High Priests (normally from the Priests or nobility). They were allowed to be married and have kids, and through the old kingdom there are even accounts of women holding the office. They were responsible for the most important ceremonies in Egyptian society (such as the coronation of a Pharaoh).

The Vizier was the chief advisor to the Pharaoh, and was second in society only to the Pharaoh. He was not of royal blood, but on the rarest of occasions could hold the position of Pharaoh. They were characterized by their undying loyalty to the Pharaoh. The Vizier could always be expected to carry out the wills of the Pharaoh since they could almost never become Pharaoh, unlike the troublesome families of the Pharaoh.

The Pharaoh was the ultimate ruler of Egyptian society. He had ultimate power and was seen as the divine ruler of Egypt. Pharaoh was a hereditary title and a line of Pharaohs (also known as a Dynasty) ruled for as long as a blood line remained unbroken. The title of Pharaoh was normally passed onto the first son. The line was broken when a ruler died without any sons to take up the title. New dynasties were established by distant relatives of the original dynasty, through females of the original dynasties, or completely new bloodlines.