

Ancient Egypt

By Gaetano Bugelli



More than 7,000 years ago, one of the world's first and greatest civilisations grew up along the banks of the River Nile in Egypt. The earliest villages were settled by hunters driven east from the drought stricken grasslands of central Africa. In time, the villages formed two kingdoms: Lower Egypt and in the Nile Delta and Upper Egypt in the valley. In about 3100 BC, King Menes united the country and built his capital at Memphis. He also established the first Egyptian Dynasty (a line of kings from the same family), known as Dynasty I. Over the next 2,000 years, Ancient Egypt was to grow and flourish.



There were two crowns at first. These were The White Crown of Upper Egypt and The Red Crown of Lower Egypt.



White Crown of Upper Egypt

Red Crown of Lower Egypt

When King Menes united Egypt, he took the official title “King of Upper and Lower Egypt”. The two royal crowns were combined at this time to form the Double Crown.



King Menes

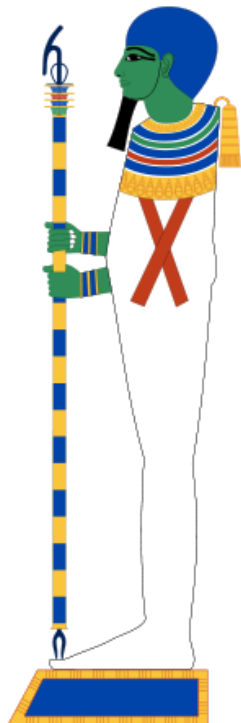


Double Crown of United Egypt

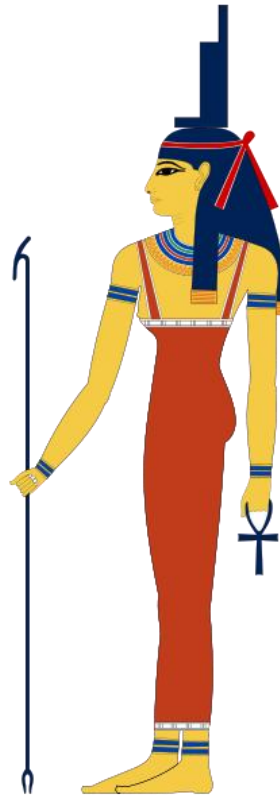
The Ancient Egyptians believed in a large number of gods and goddesses who controlled all aspects of nature and daily life. During the Old and the Middle Kingdoms the main god was the sun god, Re; during the New Kingdom, the King of Gods was Amun Re. The main goddess was Isis, the protector of all. Certain Gods were special to cities and towns. For example, Ptah was the creator god of Memphis. Many of the gods and goddesses were shown with animal heads. These represented a particular quality and made the deities easier to recognise.



Re



Ptah



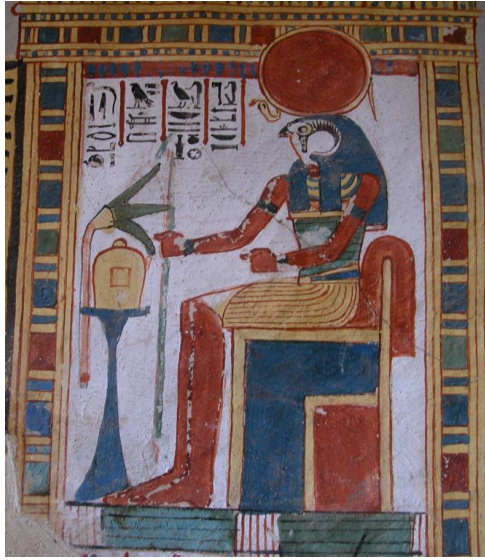
Isis



Amun Re



Neith



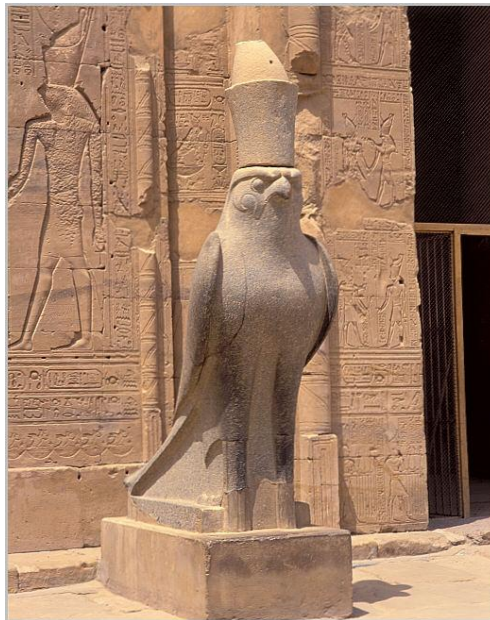
Re-Harakhte



Anubis



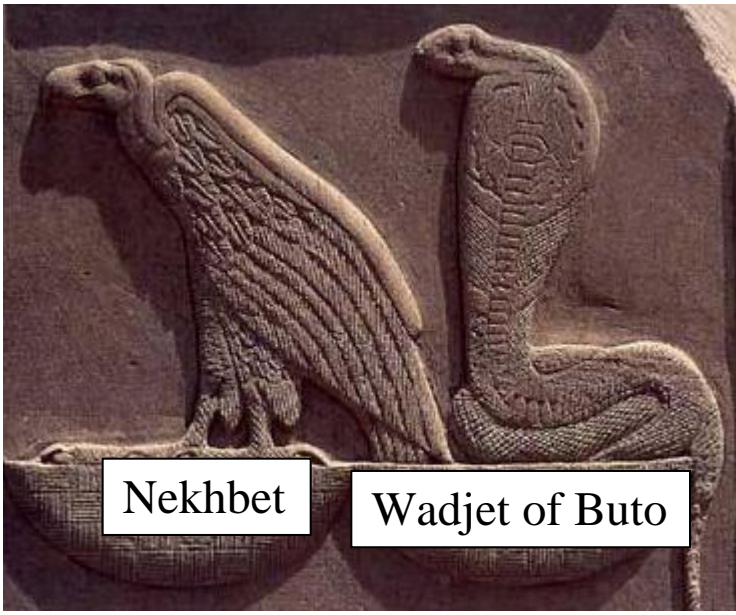
Sobek



Horus of Edfu



Shu

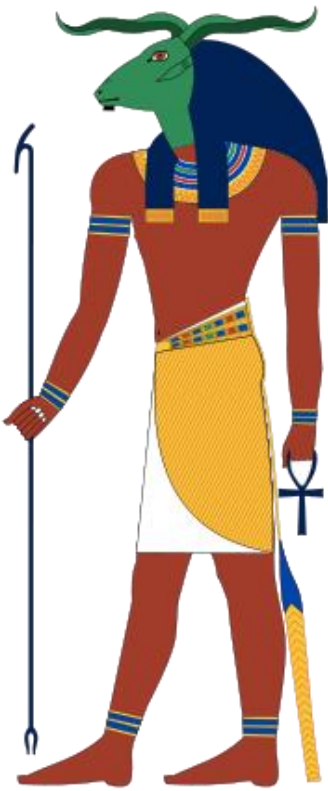


Nekhbet

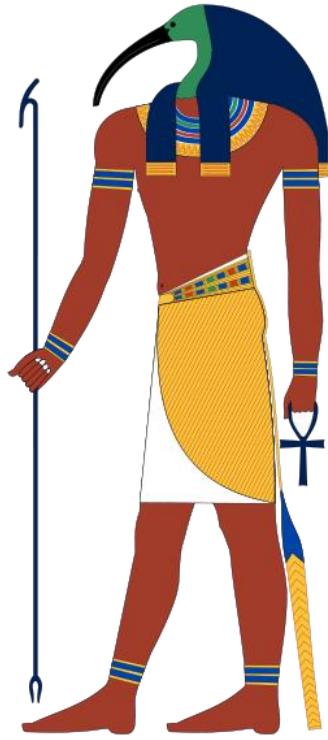
Wadjet of Buto



Ape of Thoth



Khnum



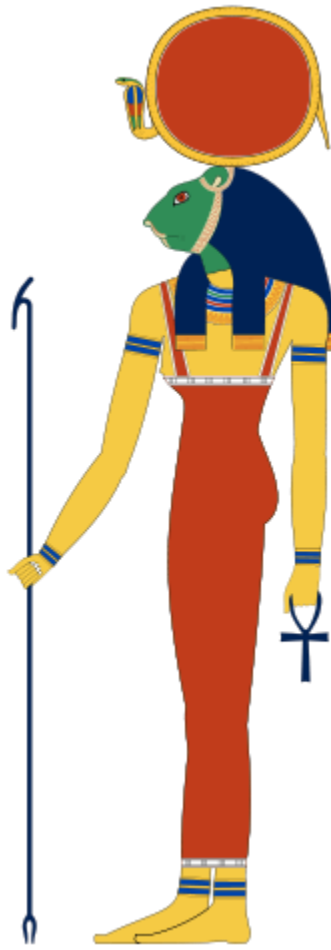
Thoth



Khonsu



Osiris



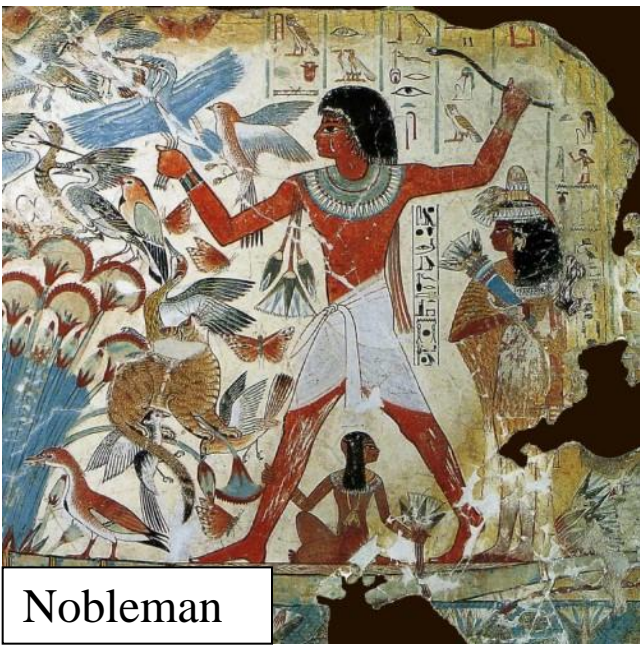
Sekhmet



Hathor



Hathor's son Ihy



Nobleman

Ancient Egyptian society was headed by the Pharaoh. Below him came the royal family and members of the upper class, including noblemen and landowners, government officials, high-ranking army officials and priests. Merchants, scribes,

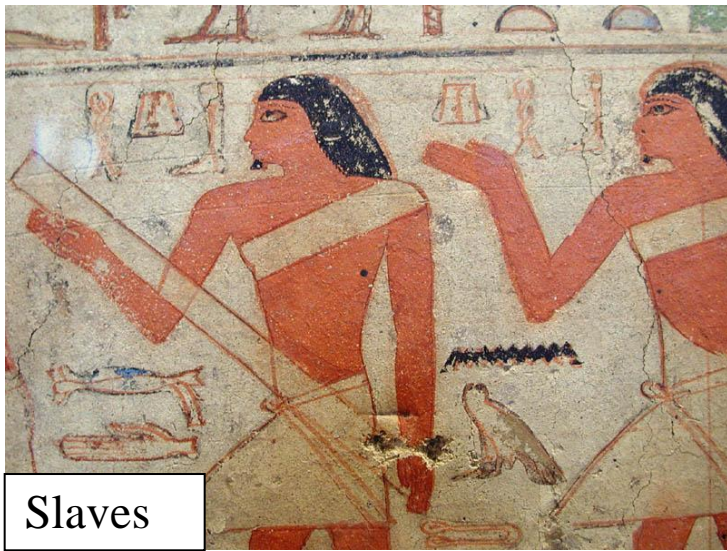
craftsmen, soldiers and sailors made up the middle class. The largest class was the lower class. It consisted of peasants and farmers. Below them came the slaves, although they too had legal rights. People could move into a higher class if they married well or got a better job.



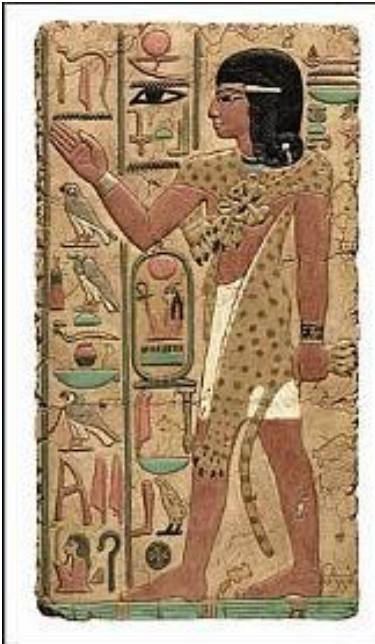
Queen



Pharaoh



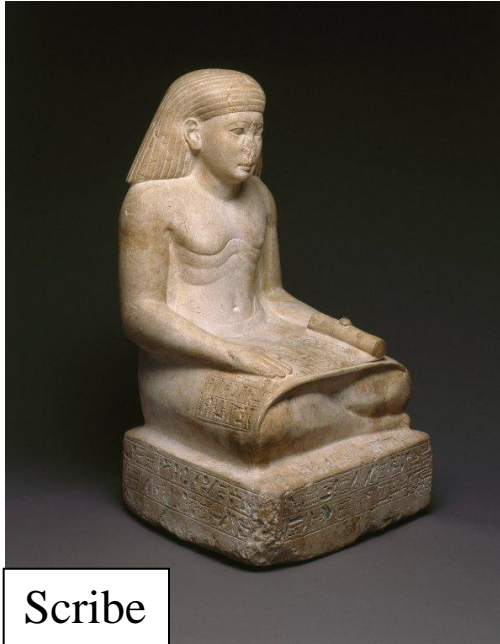
Slaves



Priest



Noblemen's wives



Scribe

The Ancient Egyptians spoke a language related to the languages of the Middle East and North Africa. Those who could, wrote using a system of picture writing, called hieroglyphics. The Egyptians began using hieroglyphics in about 3000 BC, shortly after the first known examples of writing appeared in Sumer (now south-eastern Iraq). Each picture, or hieroglyph, could stand for an object and a sound. Some represented one letter; others up to five letters. These were always consonants. Vowels were not written down.


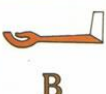






























Hieroglyphics

Ink blocks

Reed pens

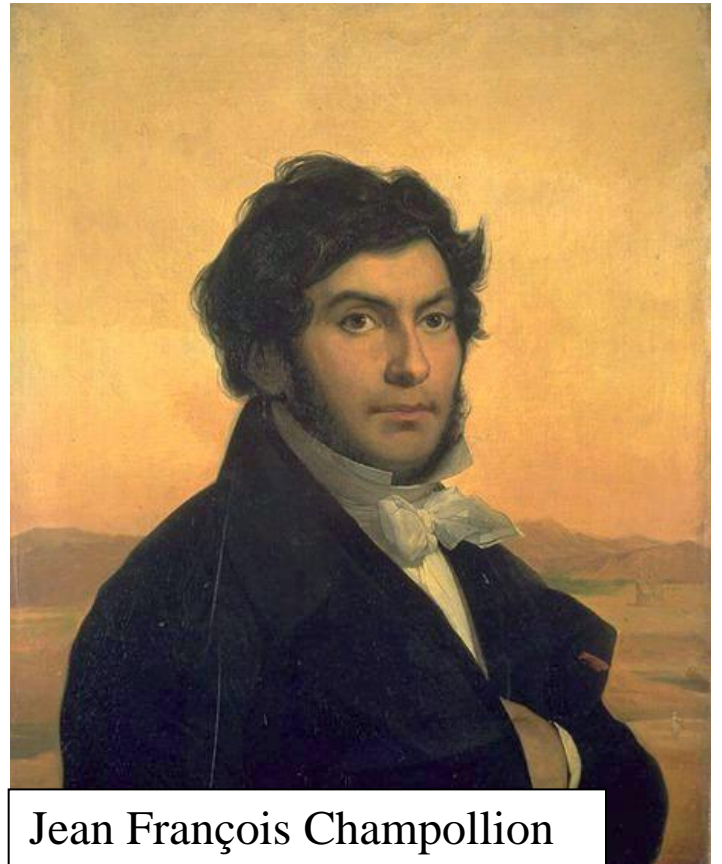


 A	 B	 B	 C	 D	 E
 F	 G	 H	 H	 I	 J
 K	 L	 M	 N	 N	 O
 P	 Q	 R	 S	 T	 T
 U	 V	 W	 X	 Y	 Z

Hieroglyph table

Hieroglyphics were last used in about AD 394. For more than 1,400 years no one could read or understand them. In 1799, however, a soldier in Napoléon Bonaparte's army in Egypt found a large, stone slab – The Rosetta Stone. On the stone was a text carved by Egyptian priests in 196 BC to mark the crowning of King Ptolemy V. The same text was written out in Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs, demotic script (a simpler form of hieroglyphs) and Greek.

By comparing the three, a French scholar called Jean François Champollion, was finally able to crack the code in 1822.



Jean François Champollion



The Rosetta Stone

Ancient Egyptian jobs

The Scribe

Most people who lived in Ancient Egypt could not read or write. The few people who did learn reading and writing were mostly men: women rarely learned these skills. Men who mastered reading and writing were privileged members of society, and they belonged to a special class of workers known as scribes. Women could not become scribes so they did not need to read and write.

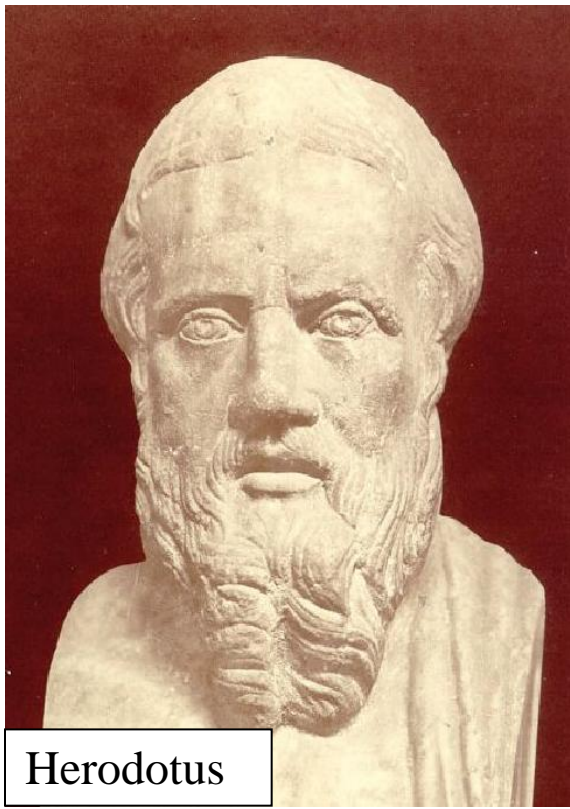


Merchants

In about 1100 BC, an Egyptian scribe wrote about his country's trade and traders. He said, 'Merchants sail upstream and downstream (along the Nile), eager to carry goods from one place to another and to supply whatever is needed anywhere'. Not only was the scribe commenting on Egypt's economy, he was pointing out the importance of the River Nile – the 'great highway'.



Merchant boat

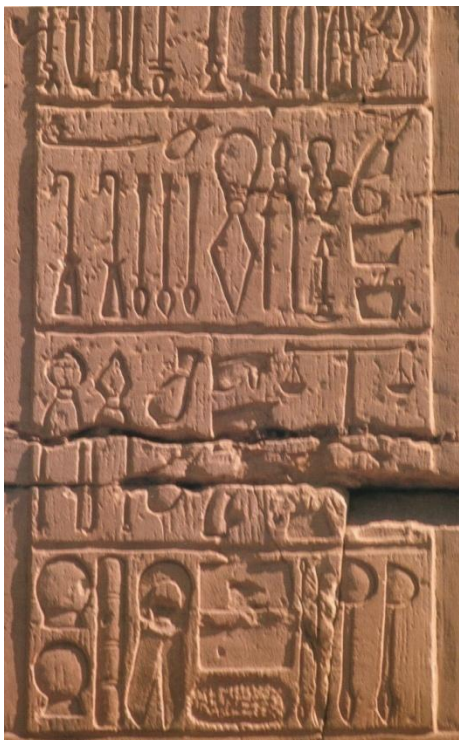


Herodotus

The doctor

The ancient Egyptians knew a great deal about medicine, and how to treat injury and illness. As a result, their doctors were highly valued people. When the ancient Greek historian Herodotus wrote an eyewitness account of Ancient Egypt in the 400s BC, he said: ‘There are plenty of doctors everywhere. Some are eye-doctors, some deal with the head, others with the teeth or the belly and

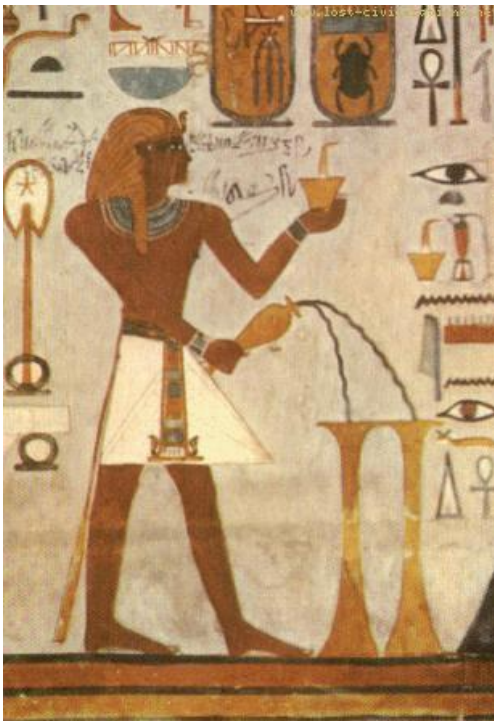
some with hidden maladies’. Herodotus was saying that Egyptian doctors specialized in different branches of medicine, just as doctors and surgeons do today. For example, a man called Iry was doctor to one of Egypt’s pharaohs. Iry was described as ‘doctor to the king’s belly’, and also as ‘the king’s eye-doctor’.



Doctors studied written medical texts. This tablet is inscribed with Ancient Egyptian surgical instruments. It forms part of the wall of the temple of Kom Ombo, which was built during the reign of the Ptolemies.

The Priest: ‘Servants of the gods’

Every Egyptian believed the same things about how the



world had been created, and how it was governed by the same major gods. People’s religious beliefs were passed down from one generation to the next, which was how it had been for as long as anyone could remember.

Priests worked in Egypt’s temples. The Egyptians believed that their gods actually lived inside the temples, that these were their homes on Earth. It was the duty of priests to serve Egypt’s gods by offering them

gifts and prayers, and to be in charge of religious ceremonies and rituals. Because of their devotion and loyalty to the gods, Egyptian priests called themselves ‘servants of the gods’.

Dancers

Both men and women worked as professional dancers in ancient Egypt. The Egyptians thought dancing was a natural expression of joy. For example, when the harvest was gathered, farmers danced to give thanks to the gods, at parties dancers entertained the guests and people danced for pleasure in towns and villages. Dancing also played a part in the religious life of the Egyptians, and special dances were performed at ceremonies. The dancers were organized in troupes that worked for individual temples, or in the houses of the royal family and other powerful families.



Painting of three female musicians in a banquet scene from Nakht's tomb



Dancers



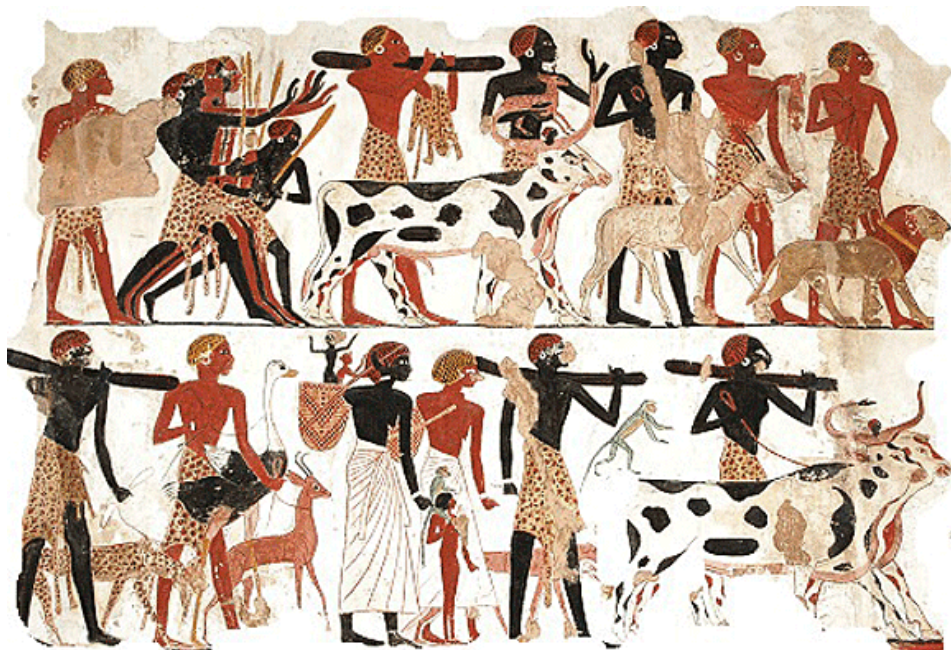
The farmer

The most numerous workers in Ancient Egypt were the country's thousands of farmers. They were among the illiterate masses, unable to read or write. They lived in simple houses made from mud-brick, and they owned few possessions. Despite their humble standard of living



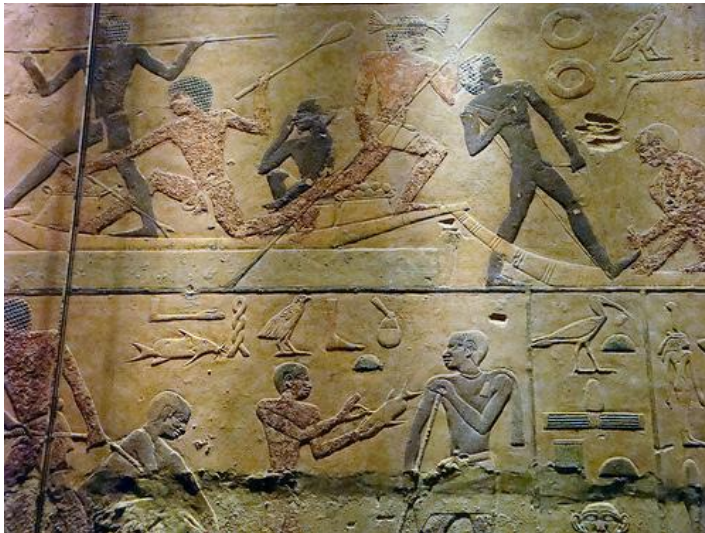
and their lowly place in society, way below that of scribes and doctors, they were probably ancient Egypt's most important workers. It was the country's farmers who produced food to feed the population – and everyone,

from a slave to a pharaoh, had to eat. In ancient Egypt, farmers were respected and valued members of society.



Fishermen

The River Nile teemed with many kinds of fish, such as perch, catfish, eels and mullet. While some ancient Egyptians thought fish were sacred and could not be eaten, others relied on them for a large part of their diet. Fish was eaten both fresh and dried, but first it had to be caught.



The hunter

The ancient Egyptians hunted their land's wildlife both for food and for sport, but it was not always that way. Long before farming and village life had spread to Egypt – the time before Egypt had pharaohs and pyramids – bands of nomadic hunter-gatherers roamed the Nile Valley, hunting wild cattle, hartebeest (a sort of antelope), deer and hares. In the desert they caught gazelles, antelopes and even jackals and desert cats. They hunted for their own survival. Slowly, however, a new way of life emerged in Egypt. People settled down in villages. They grew crops on land, and tamed wild animals to use on their farms. They no longer needed to hunt in order to survive.



The baker

Everyone in ancient Egypt ate bread. It was the staple (main) food of rich and poor alike. Until about 2000 BC bread was baked by women for their families at home, or by servants who worked for the nobles and the pharaoh. However, as the demand for bread increased, bakeries were built to make bread for towns, villages and temples, and people began to work full-time as bakers.



Loaves like this one have been found in Ancient Egyptian tombs as offerings to feed the dead as they travelled into the afterlife

Carpenters and coffin-makers

Trees such as acacias, tamarisks, palms, figs and sycamores all grew well in Egypt. However, there were not enough of them to provide craftspeople, especially carpenters and coffin-makers, with all the timber they needed.

The tree valued more than any other for its timber was the cedar – and it did not grow in Egypt. Merchants travelled north to Lebanon to trade for supplies of cedar timber, which was in great demand by Egypt's woodworkers. Other types of timber from foreign lands brought into Egypt included ebony, pine and juniper. All had their uses.



Spinners and weavers



Linen

People wore clothes made mostly from linen cloth. Sheep's wool was used to make some items of clothing, though it was never as popular as linen. Cotton did not come into use until the very end of the ancient Egyptians' long history. Both men and women made clothes. They spun and

wove plant fibres to make cloth, and shaped the cloth into clothes, and into sheets and bandages which were used to wrap mummies.



Made by spinners and weavers

The jeweller

Jewellery was made by men in workshops. It is one of ancient Egypt's best-known crafts because the materials from which it was made, such as gold and precious stones, have survived to the present day. The range of objects made by Egypt's jewellers was quite amazing – from tiny beads and amulets to large ceremonial pieces for the pharaoh and his family. Both men and women wore jewellery. Some items were believed to have magical properties and were worn to protect the wearer from harm, while others were worn for their beauty.



Lapis
lazuli



There was a stone used in making jewellery that was as highly prized as gold. The ancient Egyptians called it khesbed, and we know it as lapis lazuli. It was dark blue in colour and came from mines in modern Afghanistan, some 3200 kilometres (2000 miles) to the east. It reached Egypt by coming overland along trade routes, changing hands several times before being bought

by Egyptian merchants who sold it to the country's jewellers. Such was the rarity and value of lapis that the Egyptian's tried to copy it by making a lookalike substance from crushed quartz. This was faience, a blue or green material used for inexpensive items. It could be shaped and fired like pottery.



Faience

Who built the tombs of Ancient Egypt?

The great stone buildings of Ancient Egypt, such as temples and pyramids, are still there for us to see today. Less important buildings, such as the mud-brick houses lived in by ordinary people, have long since disappeared. They were worn away to dust by wind and water. Egypt's stone buildings are splendid examples of the masons' work, unaltered after thousands of years. Before the stonemasons could create these long lasting structures, the rock from which they were made had to be quarried from the ground. This bone breaking, dangerous work was carried out by quarrymen.

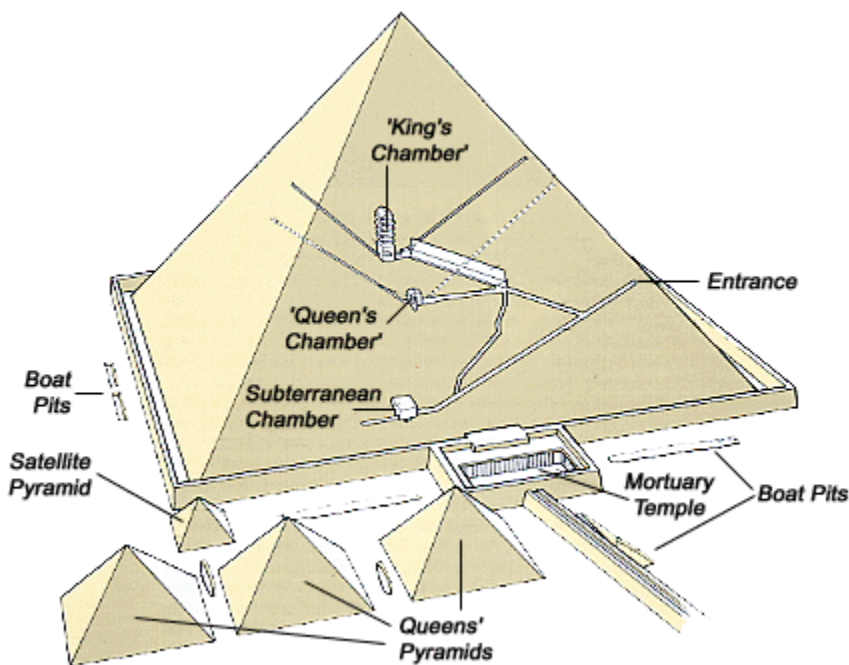
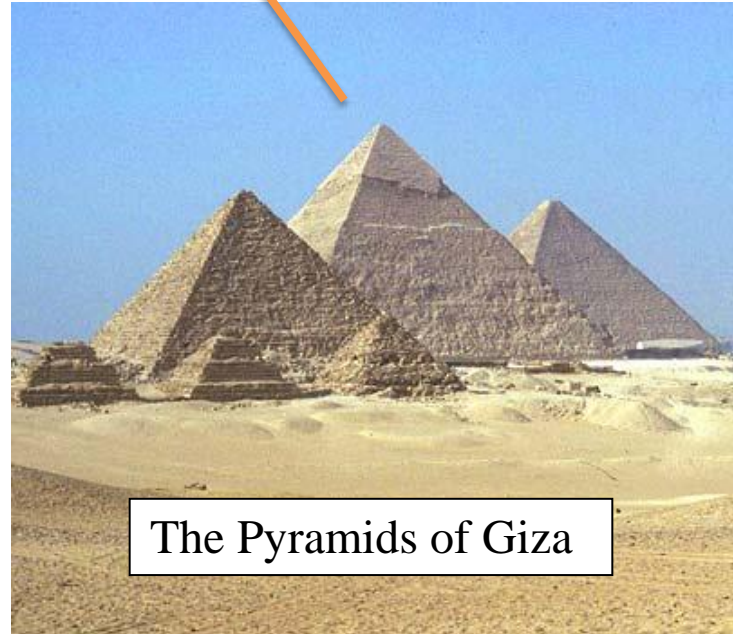


The Khafra quarry at Giza. (Tombs)

The Great Pyramid

Pyramid builders

The pyramids of Egypt were massive tombs built for the pharaohs of Egypt's Old Kingdom. The 'golden age' of pyramid building lasted for around 800 years, starting around 2600 BC. During this time some 90 pyramids were built, made from both stone and mud-brick. The most famous pyramids are a group of three at Giza. The biggest of the group, and the largest pyramid ever made, is the Great Pyramid. It was the tomb of the pharaoh Khufu, and was built by a highly organized workforce.



Model of how the Egyptians built the pyramids.

Egyptian artists

The ancient Egyptians excelled in producing works of art. Painters decorated tomb walls, coffins and statues made of wood or stone. Sculptors worked in stone, carving lifelike figures of people, gods and animals. They made statues, and also carved reliefs on the walls of temples. Painting and sculpture was teamwork, where people worked together, each man doing a specific job.



To make a painting or a statue of a standing person, the first thing an artist did was draw a grid of squares on the wall, or block of stone he was going to use. Grids contained 18 to 21 squares and each square measured one palm wide by one palm high (a palm was the distance across four fingers and the thumb of the figure being represented). Grids helped artists to work out the correct proportion for the human figure, with body parts falling on, or between, specific squares.

Mummified goat



The embalmer

The Ancient Egyptians believed in life after death. They thought that a person who had died would be reborn, and would live forever in the afterlife. For that to

succeed, they believed a person's body had to be preserved, so that it could act as 'home' for the body's spirits to return to. It was for this reason that the Egyptians perfected the craft of making mummies.

If the family of a dead person could afford to, they might hire professional mourners to come and stay with them while the body was being embalmed and bandaged. Women

worked as full-time mourners. It was their job

to grieve openly both inside and outside the dead person's house, and then to go with the body to the tomb. Mourners threw dust on their heads, waved their arms, tugged



Mummified Ape



Mummified dog

At their clothes, scratched their cheeks, cried and wailed out loud. A persons vital organs were packed into four individual containers, known as canopic jars. The jars were in the shape of the sons of the god Horus. It was their job to protect the organs. The intestines were looked after by the falcon-headed Qebhsenuf. The jackal-headed Duamutef proteted the stomach. The lungs were cared for by the ape-headed Hapy. The human-headed Imsety looked after the person's liver.



Mummified bull



Mummified cat



Mummified crocodile



Canopic jars

Timeline

Before 5000:

Early settlers farmed and built towns along the Nile.

About 3000:

Lower and Upper Egypt united. Dynasties (ruling families) 1,2 and 3.

2575 to 2130 The Old Kingdom:

Pyramids are built at Giza. Dynasties 4 to 8. Trading expeditions, war with Libyans.

2130 to 1938 First Intermediate Period:

A time of weak rulers. Dynasties 9, 10 and 11.

1938 to 1600 Middle Kingdom:

Power of pharaohs is restored. Dynasties 12 and 13.

1630 to 1540 Second Intermediate Period:

Dyansties 14 to 17

1539 to 1075 New Kingdom:

Dynasties 18 to 20. Egypt's power at its height. One of the rulers at this time was Hatshepsut (died about 1458), who send a famous expedition to the land of Punt. Reign of Akhenaten (Amenhotep IV) in the 1300s is a time of religious upheaval, as his new sun-god replaces old gods of Egypt. Tutankhamen rules from 1333 to 1323. Ramses II (1279 to 1213) known as Ramses the Great.

1075 to 665 Third Intermediate Period:

Dynasties 21 to 25. Pharaohs of Libyan heritage rule Egypt. (dynasties 21 to 23). Dynasty 25 were Kushite rules.

664 to 332 Late period, a time of foreign rule:

Dynasties 26 to 30. Local rulers struggle for power.

Dynasty 27 consisted of Persian kings who did not live in Egypt, but styled themselves as pharaohs. Dynasties 28 to 30 were native rulers. 332 Alexander the Great from Greece conquers the country. 305, a new dynasty is founded, under Ptolemy, a Greek. 51 Cleopatra becomes joint ruler of Egypt with her brother. She rules alone from 47. 31 Defeat by Roman fleet at sea battle of Actium ends Egypt's power. Romans make Egypt a Roman province.