

Lesson 2 Life in Ancient Egypt

MAIN IDEAS

Economics Egyptians developed a complex society with many different jobs and social roles.

Science and Technology Egyptians made advances in calendars, geometry, medicine, and other areas.

Belief Systems Egyptians believed in many gods and a happy life after death.

Work and Family Life

ESSENTIAL QUESTION How did work and social roles affect people in ancient Egypt?

Specialized Jobs

- Food surpluses let people do jobs other than farm
- **Scribes** wrote and kept records
- Some artisans built stone and brick houses and temples
 - others made pottery, furniture, clothing, jewelry
- Some Egyptians traded with other Africans on upper Nile
 - scrolls, linen, gold, jewelry traded for woods, skins, animals

Rulers and Priests

- Government divided empire into 42 provinces, created army
- Priest was one of highest jobs—performed rituals, cared for temples
- Together priests and the ruler held ceremonies to please the gods
 - believed if gods happy, Nile would flood, crops would grow

Slaves

- Slaves were at bottom of society but generally treated well
 - except slaves working in mines, who often died from labor
- People enslaved if had debts, committed crime, were captured in war
 - usually freed after time

Life for Women

- Women had almost equal rights, could own property
- Most cared for children, home; others wove cloth, worked in fields
 - some rose to government positions

Childhood

- Children had dolls, board games, marbles; played ball games
- Children of wealthy went to schools; most learned parents' jobs
 - almost all married in their early teens

REVIEW QUESTION

What were the levels of Egyptian society?

Expanding Knowledge

ESSENTIAL QUESTION How did learning advance in ancient Egypt?

Astronomy

- Priests studied world to find ways to please gods
 - some advances came from practical discoveries
- Priests studied sky for religious reasons
- Used 365-day cycle of star to create first practical calendar
 - star used now called Sirius

Geometry

- Surveyors used knotted rope to mark boundaries washed out by floods
- Geometric shapes were sacred, used in design of temples, monuments

Medicine

- Doctors prepared bodies for burial, knew body parts
 - performed some of first surgeries
 - some specialized in herbal medicines
- Believed that heart controlled thought, brain circulated blood

Hieroglyphs

- **Hieroglyphs**—pictures that stand for different words, sounds
- In use from 3000 B.C., writing system started with 700 characters
 - grew to include over 6,000 symbols
- **Papyrus**—paper-like material from papyrus reed
 - pressed, rolled into scrolls; light, easy to carry
 - used to create some of the first books

REVIEW QUESTION

What advances in learning did the Egyptians make?

Beliefs and Religion

ESSENTIAL QUESTION What religious beliefs did Egyptians hold?

Life After Death

- Egyptians along the Nile had positive view of life
 - Nile's black land provided for most of their needs
- Egyptians believed gods favored them, believed in happy afterlife
 - **afterlife**—life believed to follow death
- Other cultures, such as Sumerians, thought afterlife was miserable

Many Gods

- Polytheism—belief in many gods
- Egyptian gods included those of afterlife, nature
 - Re was sun god, later called Amon-Re
 - Osiris was a god who judged Egyptians after death
 - Isis was a fertility goddess, Osiris' wife
 - Anubis was a god of the dead

Making Mummies

- Dead bodies embalmed so people would have their bodies in afterlife
 - **embalm**—to preserve a body after death
- Removed all organs but heart, filled body with salt, herbs
 - created **mummy**—a body dried so it won't decay
- Dried body wrapped in linen strips; process took about 70 days
- Put in coffin in tomb with everyday objects for use in afterlife

REVIEW QUESTION

What did the Egyptians think happened after death?

Lesson Summary

- The Egyptians developed a calendar, early geometry, medical knowledge, and hieroglyphic writing.
- Ancient Egypt had a complex society with specialized jobs. Women and slaves lived better there than in many other ancient lands.
- The Egyptians believed in many gods related to nature. They also believed in a happy afterlife.

Why It Matters Now . . .

The ancient Egyptians were the first people known to develop a formal religion based on a belief in the afterlife. Such a belief is part of most religions today.