

# Ancient Civilizations of Africa—Egypt

## Section 2



### MAIN IDEAS

1. Life in the Old Kingdom was influenced by pharaohs, roles in society, and trade.
2. Religion shaped Egyptian life.
3. The pyramids were built as tombs for Egypt’s pharaohs.

## Key Terms and Places

**Old Kingdom** a period in Egyptian history that lasted from about 2700 to 2200 BC

**nobles** people from rich and powerful families

**afterlife** life after death, a widely held ancient Egyptian belief

**mummies** specially treated bodies wrapped in cloth

**elite** people of wealth and power

**pyramids** huge, stone tombs with four triangle-shaped walls that meet at a top point

**engineering** application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes

## Section Summary

### LIFE IN THE OLD KINGDOM

Around 2700 BC the Third Dynasty began a period in Egyptian history known as the **Old Kingdom**. During the next 500 years, the Egyptians developed a political system based on the belief that the pharaoh was both a king and a god. The most famous pharaoh of the Old Kingdom was Khufu, in whose honor the largest of the pyramids was built.

Although the pharaoh owned everything, he was also held personally responsible if anything went wrong. He was expected to make trade profitable and prevent war. To manage these duties, he appointed government officials, mostly from his family. Social classes developed, with the pharaoh at the top and **nobles** from rich and powerful families making up the upper class. The middle class included some government officials, scribes, and rich craftspeople. Most people, including farmers, belonged to the lower class. Lower-class people were often used by the pharaoh as labor.

**Would you say that there was any distinction between religion and politics in Egypt’s Old Kingdom? Why or why not?**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Of the upper, middle, and lower classes, which was the largest in ancient Egypt?**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Section 2, continued**

---

Trade also developed during the Old Kingdom. Traders sailed on the Mediterranean and south on the Nile and the Red Sea to acquire gold, copper, ivory, slaves, wood, and stone.

**RELIGION AND EGYPTIAN LIFE**

The Old Kingdom formalized a religious structure that everyone was expected to follow. Over time, certain cities built temples and were associated with particular gods.

Much of Egyptian religion focused on the **afterlife**. Each person's *ka* (КАН), or life force, existed after death, but remained linked to the body. To keep the *ka* from suffering, the Egyptians developed a method called embalming to preserve bodies. Royalty had their bodies preserved as **mummies**, specially treated bodies wrapped in cloth. Other members of the **elite** also had their bodies preserved.

What is the *ka*?

---

---

**THE PYRAMIDS**

**Pyramids**, spectacular stone monuments, were built to house dead rulers. Many pyramids are still standing today, amazing reminders of Egyptian **engineering**.

**CHALLENGE ACTIVITY**

**Critical Thinking: Drawing Inferences** Think about the way in which Egyptians viewed the pharaoh. Then think about how we view our current U.S. President. In what ways are these views similar? In what ways are they different? Write a one-page essay considering whether a god-king pharaoh ruling today would be loved or hated by his people.