

# Life in Ancient Egypt

**Connect to What You Know** As you have seen, Egypt prospered along the Nile. This prosperity made life easier and provided greater opportunities for many Egyptians.

## Work and Family Life

▼ **KEY QUESTION** How did work and social roles affect people in ancient Egypt?

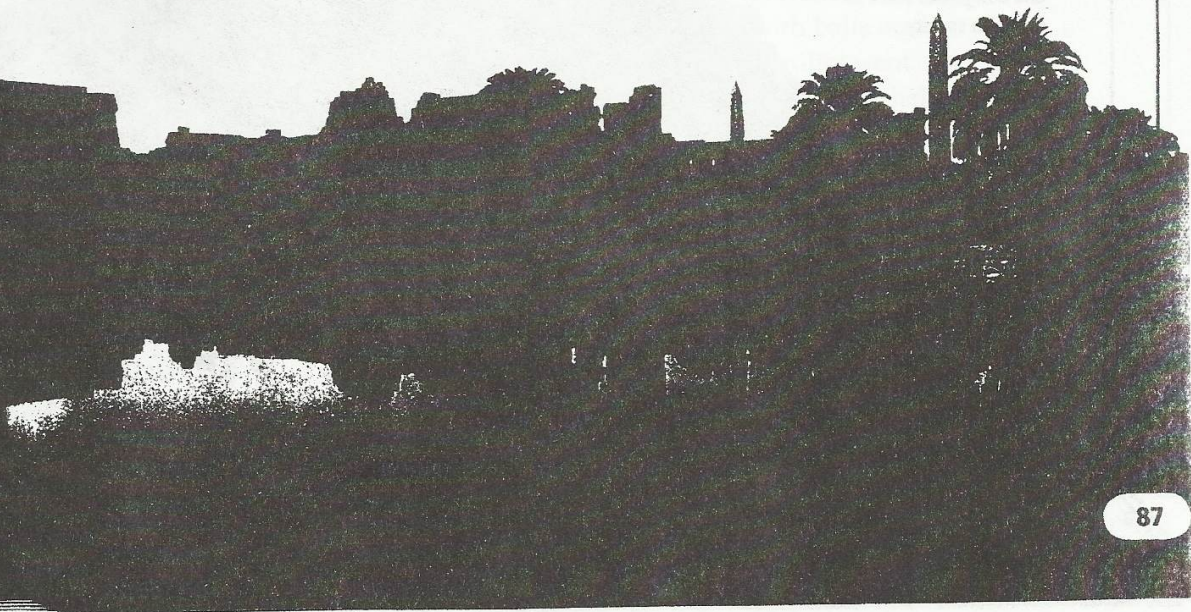
When farmers produce food surpluses, the society's economy begins to expand. Cities emerge as centers of culture and power, and people learn to do jobs that do not involve agriculture. For example, some ancient Egyptians learned to be **scribes**, people whose job was to write and keep records.

**Specialized Jobs** As Egyptian civilization grew more complex, people took on jobs other than that of a farmer or scribe. Some skilled **artisans** erected stone or brick houses and temples. Other artisans developed their own **specializations**. They made pottery, mats, furniture, linen clothing, sandals, or jewelry.

A few Egyptians traveled to the upper Nile to trade with other Africans. These traders took Egyptian products such as scrolls, linen, gold, and jewelry. They brought back exotic woods, animal skins, and live beasts.

▲ **Cat Mummy** Some Egyptians made their dead pets into mummies and gave them a formal burial. Cats were especially honored in Egypt.

**Luxor, Egypt** Skilled artisans helped to build this temple and the shafts with pointed tops, which are called obelisks. ▼



**Rulers and Priests** As Egypt grew, so did its need to organize. Egyptians created a government that divided the empire into 42 provinces. Many officials worked to keep the provinces running smoothly. Egypt also created an army to defend itself.

One of the highest jobs in Egypt was to be a priest. Priests followed formal **rituals** and took care of the temples. Before entering a temple, a priest bathed and put on special linen garments and white sandals. Priests cleaned the sacred statues in temples, changed their clothes, and even fed them meals.

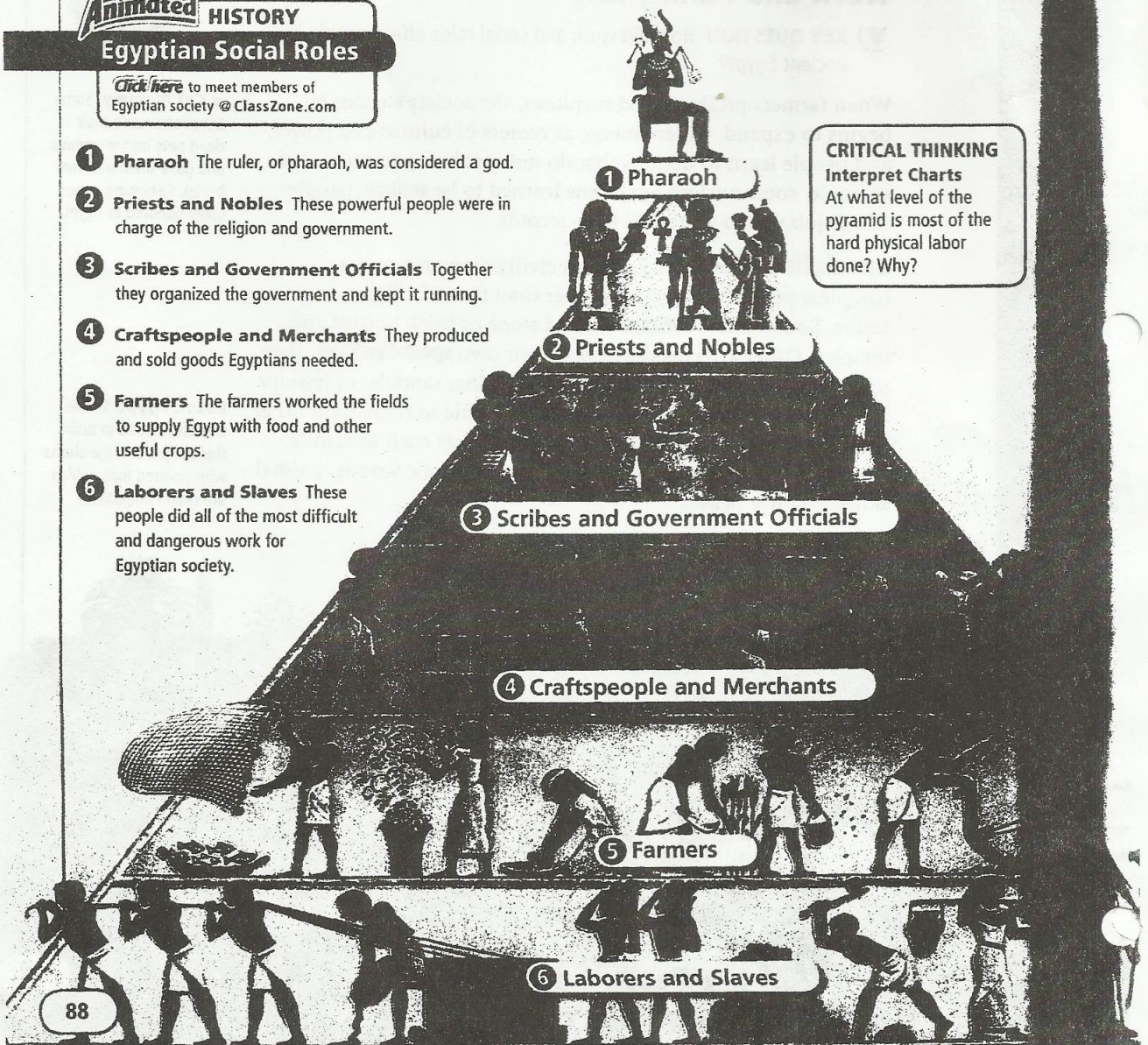
## Animated HISTORY

### Egyptian Social Roles

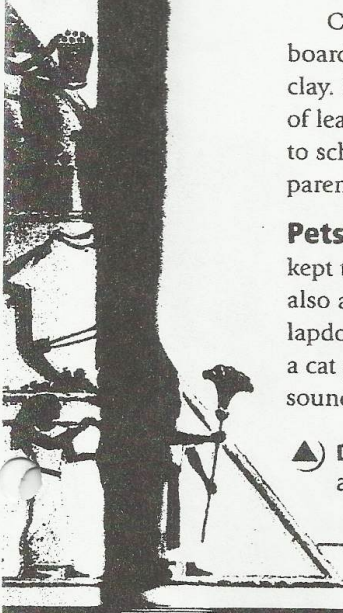
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- 1 Pharaoh** The ruler, or pharaoh, was considered a god.
- 2 Priests and Nobles** These powerful people were in charge of the religion and government.
- 3 Scribes and Government Officials** Together they organized the government and kept it running.
- 4 Craftspeople and Merchants** They produced and sold goods Egyptians needed.
- 5 Farmers** The farmers worked the fields to supply Egypt with food and other useful crops.
- 6 Laborers and Slaves** These people did all of the most difficult and dangerous work for Egyptian society.

**CRITICAL THINKING**  
**Interpret Charts**  
At what level of the pyramid is most of the hard physical labor done? Why?



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Together, the priests and the ruler held ceremonies to please the gods. Egyptians believed that if the gods were angry, the Nile would not flood. As a result, crops would not grow, and people would die. So the ruler and the priests tried hard to keep the gods satisfied. By doing so, they hoped to maintain the social and political order.

**Slaves** Slaves were at the bottom of society. In Egypt, most of the slaves were captured in war. Some were captured soldiers, and others were just unlucky enough to be on the losing side.

Many of these enslaved people worked on public building projects, such as pyramids or temples. As difficult as this work was, it was preferable to working in the mines and quarries of the Eastern Desert and the Sinai. Assignment to these work sites was often a one-way trip. Shortages of slave labor were remedied quickly and cruelly. For instance, when the pharaoh Ramses II needed more labor for one of his major building projects, he sent soldiers into the Western Desert to kidnap Lybians. (You'll read more about Ramses in Section 4.)

Slaves who were domestic servants were comparatively lucky. They worked in less dangerous circumstances, lived in more comfortable housing, and ate more and better food. They could also rise to fairly important, trusted positions within the household.

**Women and Children** Egypt was one of the best places in the ancient world to be a woman. Unlike other ancient African cultures, in Egyptian society men and women had fairly equal rights. For example, they could both own and manage their own property.

The main job of most women was to care for their children and home, but some did other jobs too. Some women wove cloth. Others worked with their husbands in fields or workshops.

Children in Egypt played with toys such as dolls, animal figures, board games, and marbles. Their parents made the toys from wood or clay. Boys and girls also played rough physical games with balls made of leather or reeds. Boys and some girls from wealthy families went to schools run by scribes or priests. Most other children learned their parents' jobs. Almost all Egyptians married in their early teens.

**Pets** Ancient Egyptians kept many different kinds of pets. Dogs were kept to take on hunting trips, as they sometimes are today. There was also a popular breed (resembling a dachshund) that was more of a lapdog. The cat, however, was the most favored pet. There was even a cat goddess, Bastet. The Egyptian word for cat was *miw*, after the sound a cat makes.

▲ **DRAW CONCLUSIONS** Explain the roles of people at different levels of ancient Egyptian society.