SECTION 1

# Geography and Early Egypt

## What You Will Learn...

**Main Ideas**

1. Egypt was called the gift of the Nile because the Nile River was so important.
2. Civilization developed after people began farming along the Nile River.
3. Strong kings unified all of ancient Egypt.

**The Big Idea**

The water and fertile soils of the Nile Valley enabled a great civilization to develop in Egypt.

### Key Terms and Places

Nile River, *p. 278*
Upper Egypt, *p. 278*
Lower Egypt, *p. 278*
cataracts, *p. 279*
delta, *p. 279*
pharaoh, *p. 281*
dynasty, *p. 281*

TAKING NOTES As you read, take notes on the characteristics of the Nile River and on the way in which it affected Egypt. Use a chart like this one to organize your notes.

| Nile River | |
|---|---|
| Characteristics | Effect on Egypt |

IN 7.1.1, 7.3.11

## If YOU lived there...

Your family farms in the Nile Valley. Each year when the river's floodwaters spread rich soil on the land, you help your father plant barley. When you are not in the fields, you spin fine linen thread from flax you have grown. Sometimes your family goes on an outing to the river, where your father hunts birds in the tall grasses.

**Why do you like living in the Nile Valley?**

**BUILDING BACKGROUND** In ancient times, the fertile land in the Nile River Valley drew people to live in the area. Over time, a farming civilization developed that became ancient Egypt. This civilization would be stable and long-lasting.

## The Gift of the Nile

Geography played a key role in the development of Egyptian civilization. The **Nile River** brought life to Egypt and enabled it to thrive. The river was so important to people in this region that the Greek historian Herodotus (hi-RAHD-uh-tuhs) called Egypt the gift of the Nile.

### Location and Physical Features

The Nile is the longest river in the world. It begins in central Africa and runs north through Egypt to the Mediterranean Sea, a distance of over 4,000 miles. The civilization of ancient Egypt developed along a 750-mile stretch of the Nile.

Ancient Egypt included two regions, a southern region and a northern region. The southern region was called **Upper Egypt**. It was so named because it was located upriver in relation to the Nile's flow. **Lower Egypt**, the northern region, was located downriver. The Nile sliced through the desert of Upper Egypt. There, it created a fertile river valley about 13 miles wide. On either side of the Nile lay hundreds of miles of bleak desert sands.

As you can see on the map, the Nile flowed through rocky, hilly land to the south of Egypt. At several points, this rough terrain caused **cataracts**, or rapids, to form. The first cataract was located 720 miles south of the Mediterranean Sea. This cataract, shown by a red bar on the map, marked the southern border of Upper Egypt. Five more cataracts lay farther south. These cataracts made sailing on that portion of the Nile very difficult.

In Lower Egypt, the Nile divided into several branches that fanned out and flowed into the Mediterranean Sea. These branches formed a **delta**, a triangle-shaped area of land made from soil deposited by a river. At the time of ancient Egypt, swamps and marshes covered much of the Nile Delta. Some two-thirds of Egypt's fertile farmland was located in the Nile Delta.

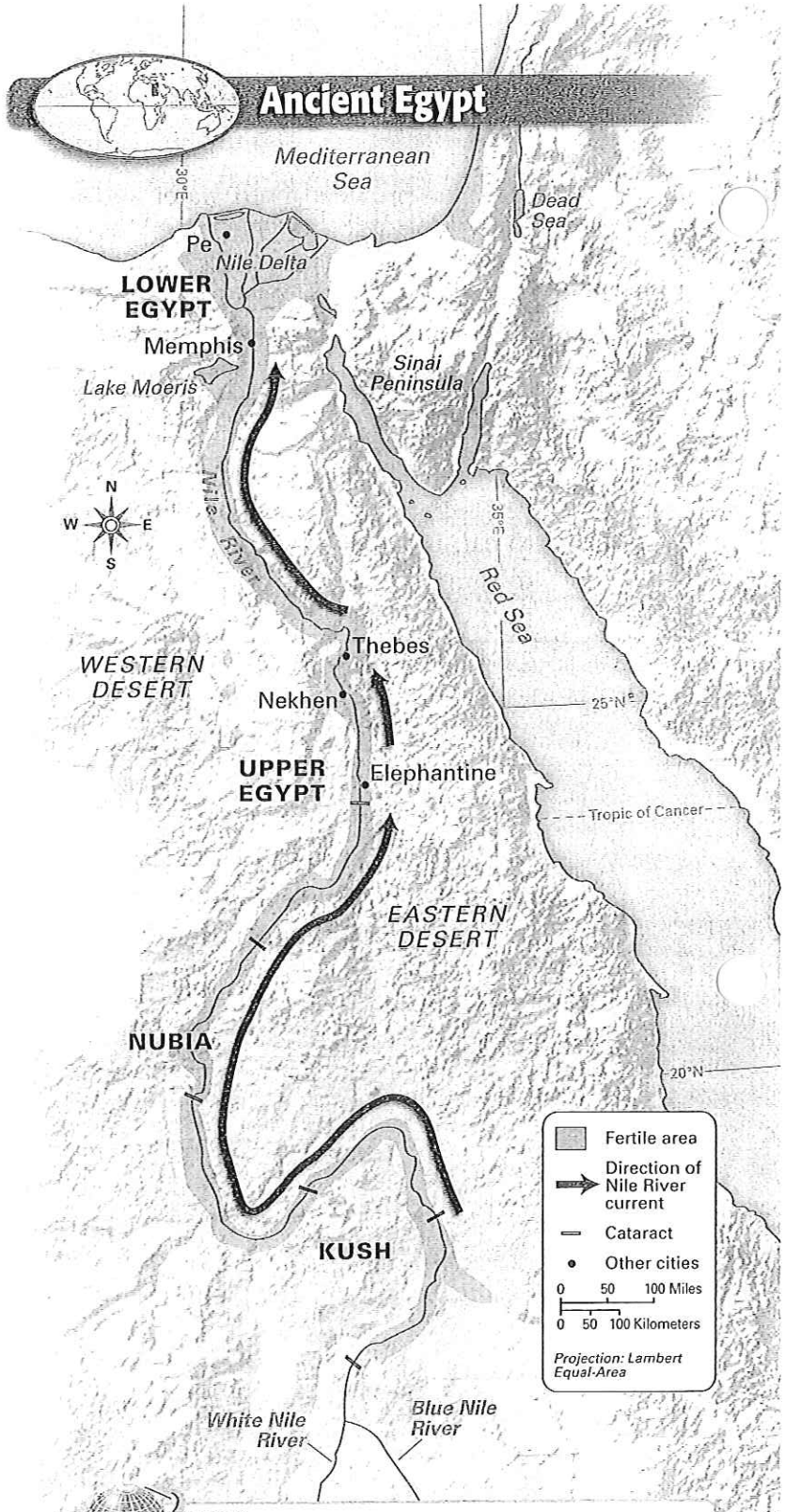
## The Floods of the Nile

Because little rain fell in the region, most of Egypt was desert. Each year, however, rain fell far to the south of Egypt in the highlands of East Africa. This rainfall caused the Nile River to flood. Almost every year, the Nile flooded Upper Egypt in mid-summer and Lower Egypt in the fall.

The Nile's flooding coated the land around it with a rich silt. This silt made the soil ideal for farming. The silt also made the land a dark color. That is why Egyptians called their country the black land. They called the dry, lifeless desert beyond the river valley the red land.

Each year, Egyptians eagerly awaited the flooding of the Nile River. For them, the river's floods were a life-giving miracle. Without the Nile's regular flooding, people never could have farmed in Egypt. The Nile truly was a gift to Egypt.

**READING CHECK** **Finding Main Ideas** Why was Egypt called the gift of the Nile?




**map zone** Geography Skills

**Place** Egypt was divided into Lower and Upper Egypt.

1. **Identify** What deserts were located around Egypt?
2. **Explain** Where are Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt located in relation to the Mediterranean Sea?

## Civilization Develops in Egypt

The Nile provided both water and fertile soil for farming. Over time, scattered farms grew into villages and cities. Eventually, an Egyptian civilization developed.

### Increased Food Production

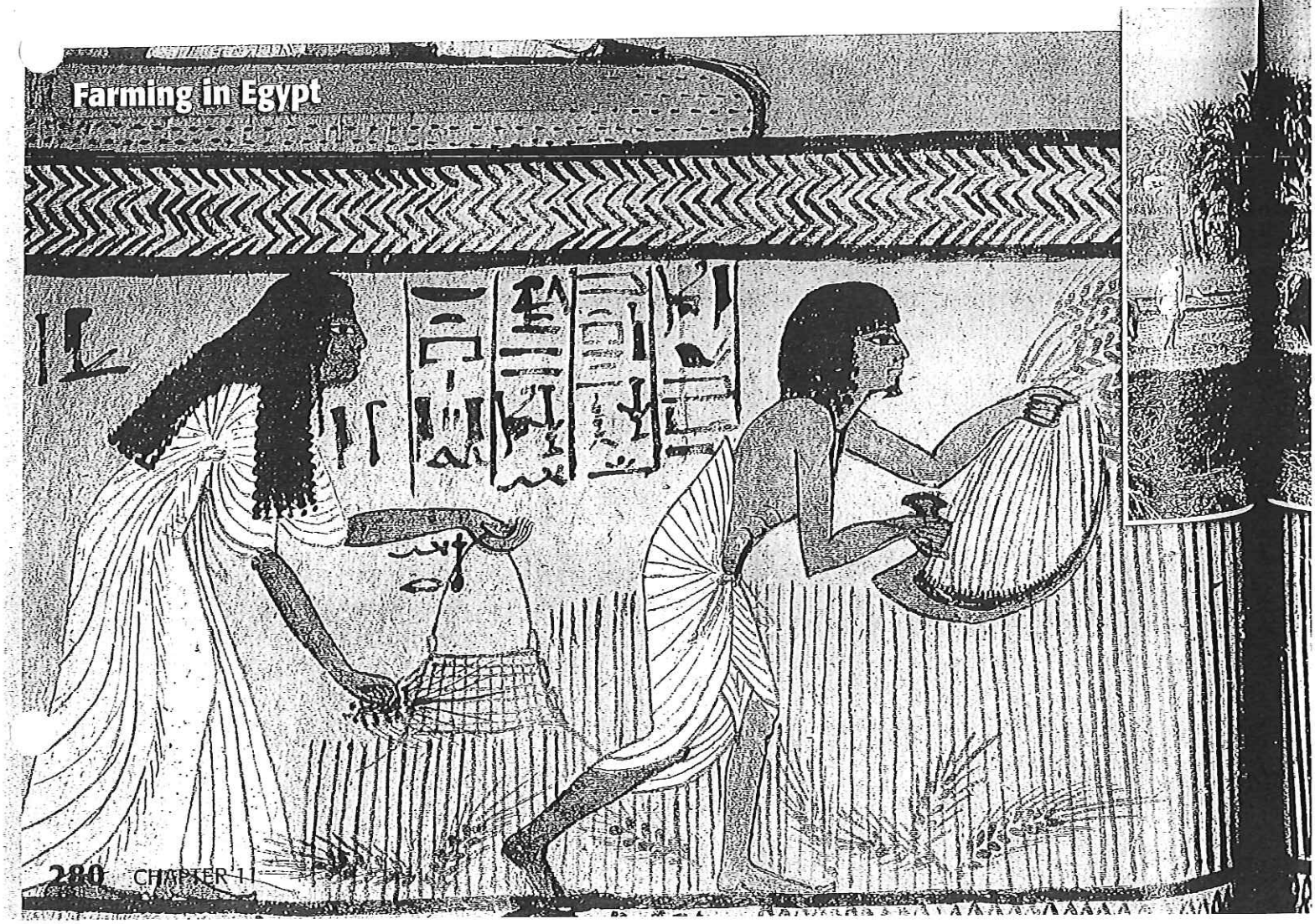
Hunter-gatherers first moved into the Nile Valley more than 12,000 years ago. They found plants, wild animals, and fish there to eat. In time, these people learned how to farm, and they settled along the Nile. By 4500 BC, farmers living in small villages grew wheat and barley.

Over time, farmers in Egypt developed an irrigation system. This system consisted of a series of canals that directed the Nile's flow and carried water to the fields.

The Nile provided Egyptian farmers with an abundance of food. Farmers in Egypt grew wheat, barley, fruits, and vegetables. They also raised cattle and sheep. The river provided many types of fish, and hunters trapped wild geese and ducks along its banks. With these many sources of food, the Egyptians enjoyed a varied diet.

### Two Kingdoms

In addition to a stable food supply, Egypt's location offered another advantage. It had natural barriers, which made it hard to invade Egypt. To the west, the desert was too big and harsh to cross. To the north, the Mediterranean Sea kept many enemies away. To the east, more desert and the Red Sea provided protection. Finally, to the south, cataracts in the Nile made it difficult for invaders to sail into Egypt that way.

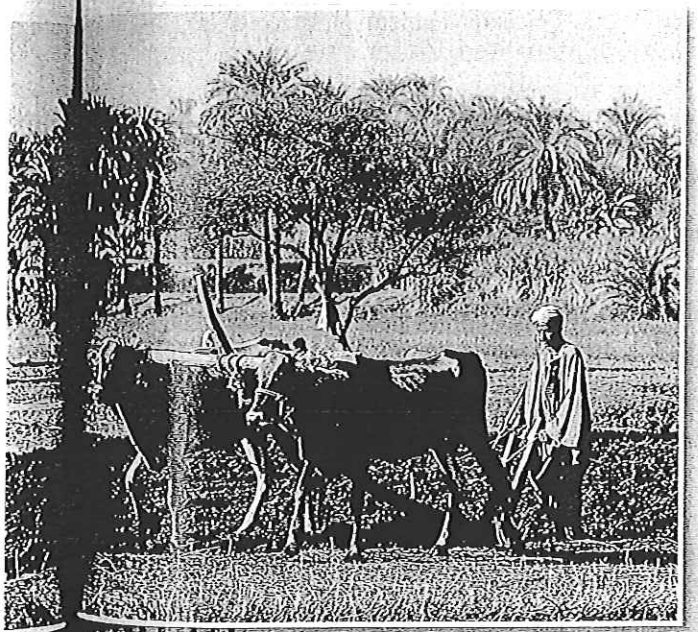


Farming in Egypt

Protected from invaders, the villages of Egypt grew. Wealthy farmers emerged as village leaders. In time, strong leaders gained control over several villages. By 3200 BC, villages had grown and banded together to create two kingdoms—Lower Egypt and Upper Egypt.

Each kingdom had its own capital city where its ruler was based. The capital city of Lower Egypt was Pe, located in the Nile Delta. There, wearing a red crown, the king of Lower Egypt ruled. The capital city of Upper Egypt was Nekhen, located on the Nile's west bank. In this southern kingdom, the king wore a cone-shaped white crown. For centuries, Egyptians referred to their country as the two lands.

**READING CHECK** **Summarizing** What attracted early settlers to the Nile Valley?



**Farmers in ancient Egypt learned how to grow wheat and barley. The tomb painting at left shows a couple harvesting their crop. As the photo above shows, people in Egypt still farm along the Nile.**

**ANALYZING VISUALS** **Based on the above photo, what methods do Egyptian farmers use today?**

## Kings Unify Egypt

**FOCUS ON READING**
Identify two or three categories that you could use to organize the information under Kings Unify Egypt.

According to tradition, around 3100 BC Menes (MEE-neez) rose to power in Upper Egypt. Some historians think Menes is a myth and that his accomplishments were really those of other ancient kings named Aha, Scorpion, or Narmer.

Menes wanted to unify the kingdoms of Upper and Lower Egypt. He had his armies invade Lower Egypt and take control of it. Menes then married a princess from Lower Egypt to strengthen his control over the newly unified country.

Menes wore both the white crown of Upper Egypt and the red crown of Lower Egypt to symbolize his leadership over the two kingdoms. Later, he combined the two crowns into a double crown, as you can see on the next page.

Many historians consider Menes to be Egypt's first **pharaoh** (FEHR-oh), the title used by the rulers of ancient Egypt. The title *pharaoh* means "great house." Menes also founded Egypt's first **dynasty**, or series of rulers from the same family.

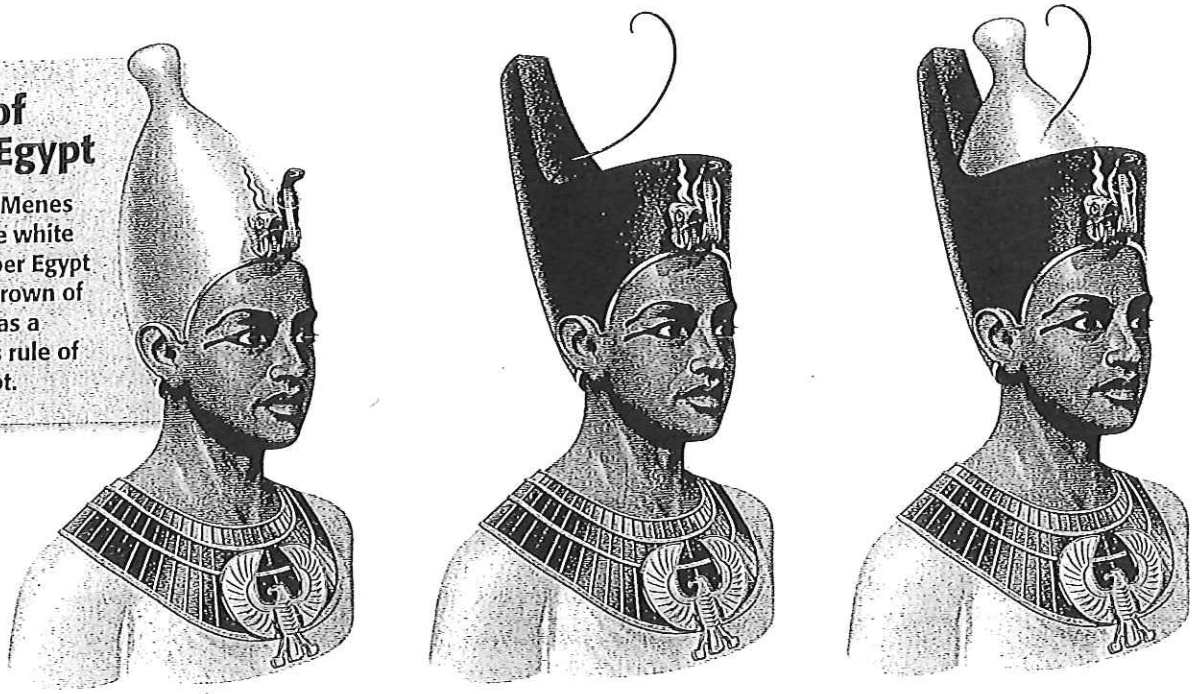
Menes built a new capital city at the southern tip of the Nile Delta. The city was later named Memphis. It was near where Lower Egypt met Upper Egypt, close to what is now Cairo, Egypt. For centuries, Memphis was the political and cultural center of Egypt. Many government offices were located there, and the city bustled with artistic activity.

Egypt's First Dynasty was a theocracy that lasted for about 200 years. A theocracy is a government ruled by religious leaders such as priests or a monarch thought to be divine.

Over time, Egypt's rulers extended Egyptian territory southward along the Nile River and into Southwest Asia. They also improved irrigation and trade, making Egypt wealthier.

## Crown of United Egypt

The pharaoh Menes combined the white crown of Upper Egypt and the red crown of Lower Egypt as a symbol of his rule of a united Egypt.



Eventually, however, rivals arose to challenge Egypt's First Dynasty for power. These challengers took over Egypt and established the Second Dynasty. In time, some 30 dynasties would rule ancient Egypt over a span of more than 2,500 years.

**READING CHECK** **Drawing Inferences** Why do you think Menes wanted to rule over both kingdoms of Egypt?

**SUMMARY AND PREVIEW** As you have read, ancient Egypt began in the fertile Nile River Valley. Two kingdoms developed in this region. The two kingdoms were later united under one ruler, and Egyptian territory grew. In the next section you will learn how Egypt continued to grow and change under later rulers in a period known as the Old Kingdom.

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## Section 1 Assessment

### Reviewing Ideas, Terms, and Places

1. **a. Identify** Where was the Egyptian kingdom of **Lower Egypt** located?
   **b. Analyze** Why was the **delta** of the **Nile River** well suited for settlement?
   **c. Predict** How might the Nile's **cataracts** have both helped and hurt Egypt?
2. **a. Describe** What foods did the Egyptians eat?
   **b. Analyze** What role did the Nile play in supplying Egyptians with the foods they ate?
   **c. Elaborate** How did the desert on both sides of the Nile help ancient Egypt?
3. **a. Identify** Who was the first **pharaoh** of Egypt?
   **b. Draw Conclusions** Why did the pharaohs of the First Dynasty wear a double crown?

### Critical Thinking

4. **Categorizing** Create a chart like the one shown here. Use your notes to provide information for each category in the chart.

| Development along Nile | Two Kingdoms | United Kingdoms |
|---|---|---|
| | | |

**FOCUS ON WRITING**

5. **Thinking about Geography and Early History** In your riddle, what clues could you include related to Egypt's geography and early history? For example, you might include the Nile River or pharaohs as clues. Add some ideas to your notes.

# The Old Kingdom

SECTION 2

## If YOU lived there...

You are a farmer in ancient Egypt. To you, the pharaoh is the god Horus as well as your ruler. You depend on his strength and wisdom. For part of the year, you are busy planting crops in your fields. But at other times of the year, you work for the pharaoh. You are helping to build a great tomb so that your pharaoh will be comfortable in the afterlife.

**How do you feel about working for the pharaoh?**

**BUILDING BACKGROUND** As in other ancient cultures, Egyptian society was based on a strict order of social classes. A small group of royalty and nobles ruled Egypt. They depended on the rest of the population to supply food, crafts, and labor. Few people questioned this arrangement of society.

## Life in the Old Kingdom

The First and Second Dynasties ruled ancient Egypt for about four centuries. Around 2700 BC, though, a new dynasty rose to power in Egypt. Called the Third Dynasty, its rule began a period in Egyptian history known as the Old Kingdom.

### Early Pharaohs

The **Old Kingdom** was a period in Egyptian history that lasted for about 500 years, from about 2700 to 2200 BC. During this time, the Egyptians continued to develop their political system. The system they developed was based on the belief that Egypt's pharaoh, or ruler, was both a king and a god.

The ancient Egyptians believed that Egypt belonged to the gods. The Egyptians believed the pharaoh had come to Earth in order to manage Egypt for the rest of the gods. As a result, he had absolute power over all the land and people in Egypt.

But the pharaoh's status as both king and god came with many responsibilities. People blamed him if crops did not grow well or if disease struck. They also demanded that the pharaoh make trade profitable and prevent wars.

### What You Will Learn...

**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.

**The Big Idea**

Egyptian government and religion were closely connected during the Old Kingdom.

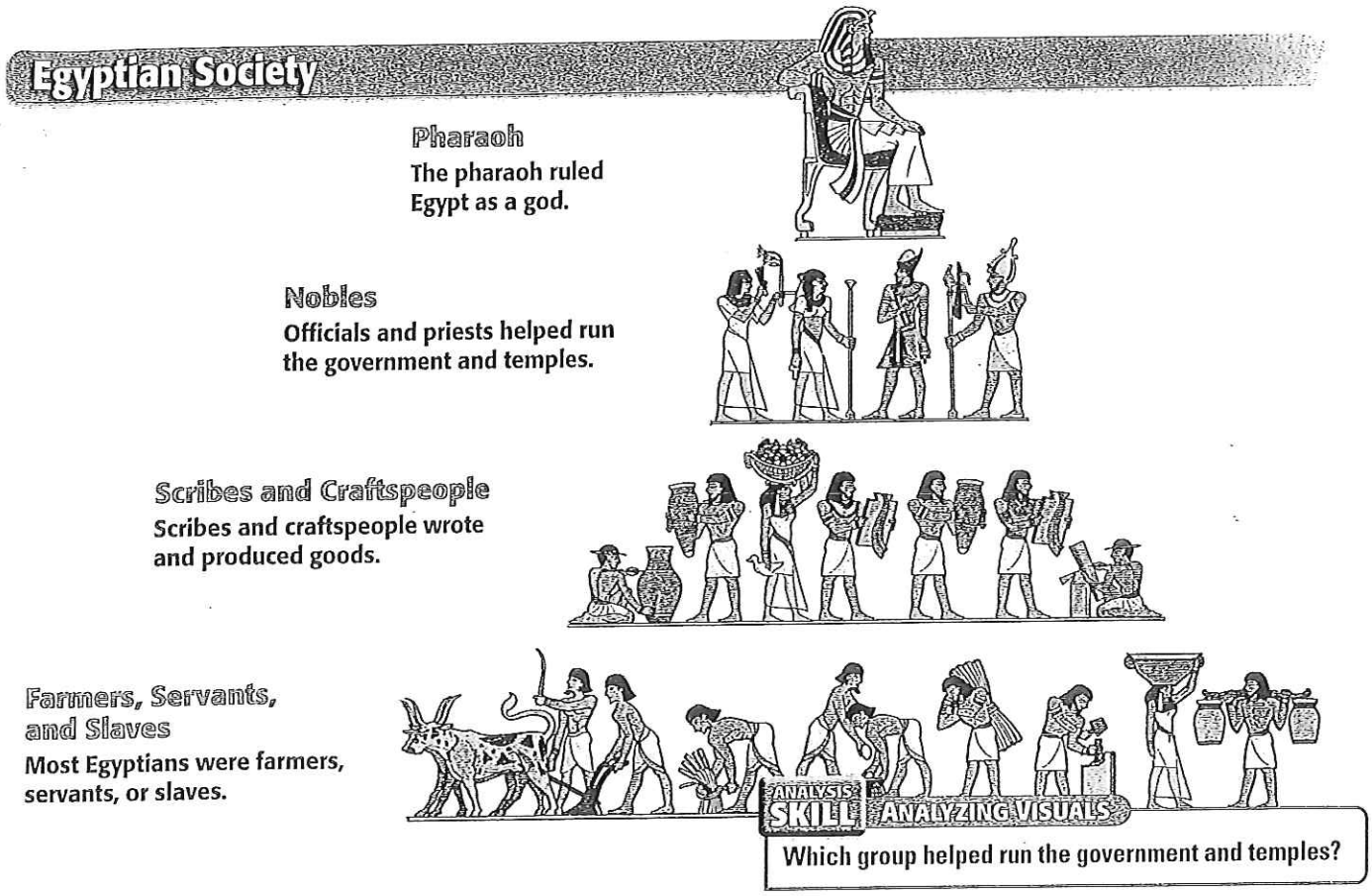
**Key Terms**

Old Kingdom, *p. 283*
nobles, *p. 284*
afterlife, *p. 286*
mummies, *p. 286*
elite, *p. 287*
pyramids, *p. 288*
engineering, *p. 288*

**TAKING NOTES** As you read, take notes on government and religion during Egypt's Old Kingdom. Use a chart like the one below to record your notes.

| Government | Religion |
|---|---|
| | |

IN 7.1.1, 7.1.2




The most famous pharaoh of the Old Kingdom was Khufu (KOO-foo), who ruled in the 2500s BC. Even though he is famous, we know relatively little about Khufu's life. Egyptian legend says that he was cruel, but historical records tell us that the people who worked for him were well fed. Khufu is best known for the monuments that were built to him.

## Society and Trade

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY
**acquire** (uh-KWYR) to get

By the end of the Old Kingdom, Egypt had about 2 million people. As the population grew, social classes appeared. The Egyptians believed that a well-ordered society would keep their kingdom strong.

At the top of Egyptian society was the pharaoh. Just below him were the upper classes, which included priests and key government officials. Many of these priests and officials were **nobles**, or people from rich and powerful families.

Next in society was the middle class. This class included lesser government officials, scribes, and a few rich craftspeople.

The people in Egypt's lower class, more than 80 percent of the population, were mostly farmers. During flood season, when they could not work in the fields, farmers worked on the pharaoh's building projects. Servants and slaves also worked hard.

As society developed during the Old Kingdom, Egypt traded with some of its neighbors. Traders traveled south along the Nile to Nubia to acquire gold, copper, ivory, slaves, and stone for building. Trade with Syria provided Egypt with wood for building and for fire.

Egyptian society grew more complex during this time. It continued to be organized, disciplined, and highly religious.

READING CHECK **Generalizing** How was society structured in the Old Kingdom?

## Religion and Egyptian Life

Worshipping the gods was a part of daily life in Egypt. But the Egyptian focus on religion extended beyond people's lives. Many customs focused on what happened after people died.

### The Gods of Egypt

The Egyptians practiced polytheism. Before the First Dynasty, each village worshipped its own gods. During the Old Kingdom, however, Egyptian officials expected everyone to worship the same gods, though how people worshipped the gods might differ from place to place.

The Egyptians built temples to the gods all over the kingdom. Temples collected payments from both worshippers and the government. These payments enabled the temples to grow more influential.

Over time, certain cities became centers for the worship of certain gods. In the city of Memphis, for example, people prayed to Ptah, the creator of the world.

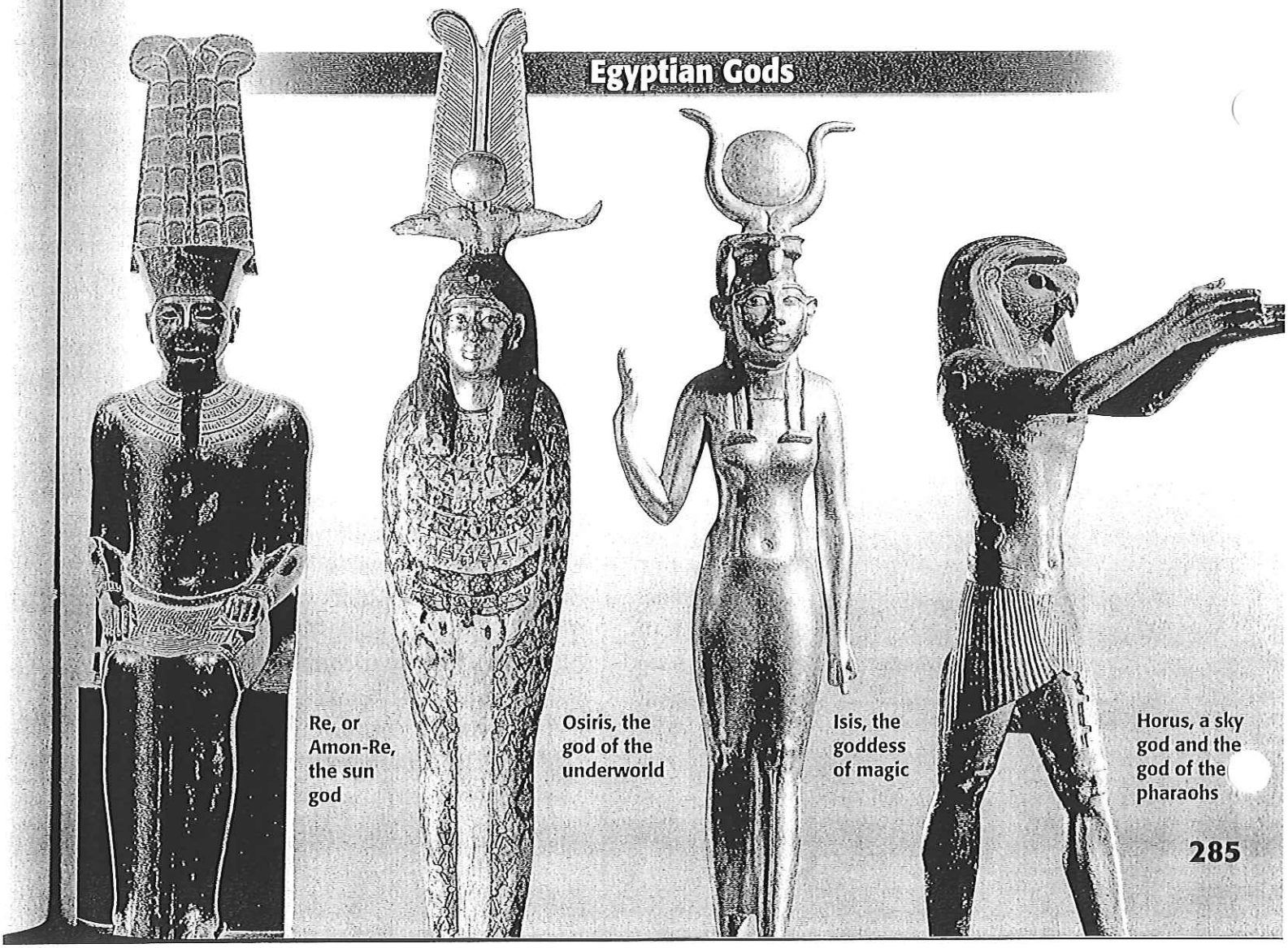
The Egyptians worshipped many gods besides Ptah. They had gods for nearly everything, including the sun, the sky, and Earth. Many gods blended human and animal forms. For example, Anubis, the god of the dead, had a human body but a jackal's head. Other major gods included

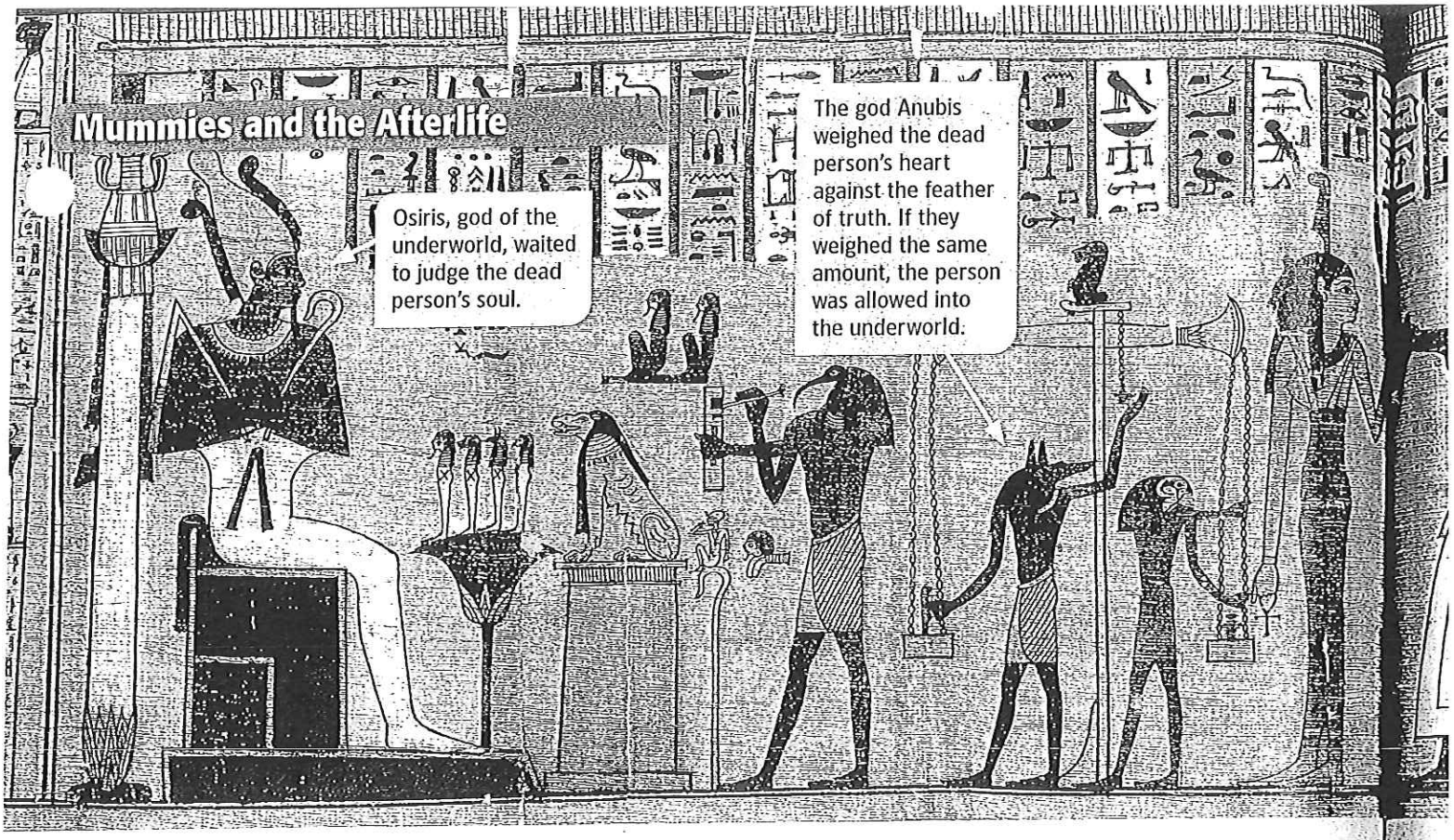
- Re, or Amon-Re, the sun god
- Osiris, the god of the underworld
- Isis, the goddess of magic
- Horus, a sky god; god of the pharaohs
- Thoth, the god of wisdom
- Geb, the Earth god

Egyptian families also worshipped household gods at shrines in their homes.

**FOCUS ON READING**

How is the text under the heading Religion and Egyptian Life categorized?






## Emphasis on the Afterlife

Much of Egyptian religion focused on the **afterlife**, or life after death. The Egyptians believed that the afterlife was a happy place. Paintings from Egyptian tombs show the afterlife as an ideal world where all the people are young and healthy.

The Egyptian belief in the afterlife stemmed from their idea of *ka* (KAH), or a person's life force. When a person died, his or her *ka* left the body and became a spirit. The *ka* remained linked to the body and could not leave its burial site. However, it had all the same needs that the person had when he or she was living. It needed to eat, sleep, and be entertained.

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY
**method** a way of doing something

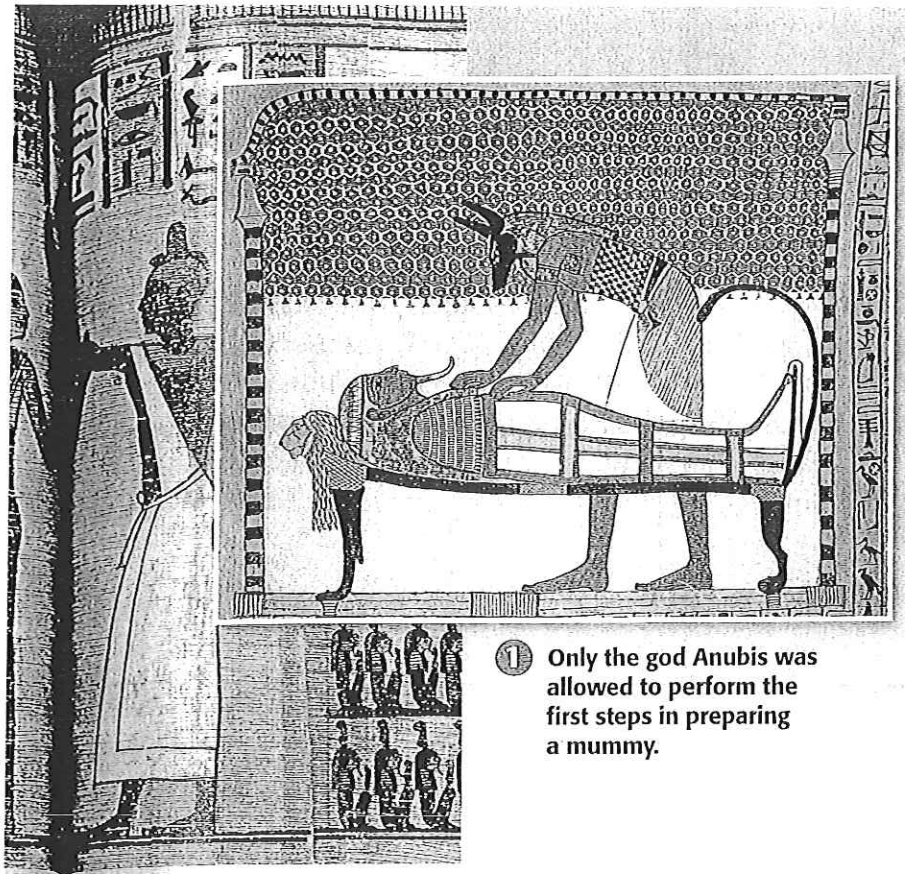
To fulfill the *ka*'s needs, people filled tombs with objects for the afterlife. These objects included furniture, clothing, tools, jewelry, and weapons. Relatives of the dead were expected to bring food and beverages to their loved ones' tombs so the *ka* would not be hungry or thirsty.

## Burial Practices

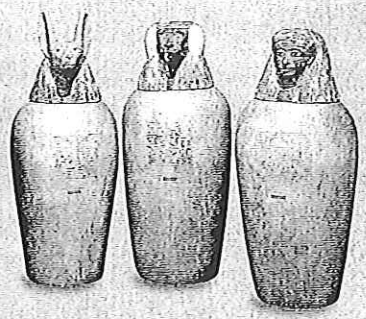
Egyptian ideas about the afterlife shaped their burial practices. For example, the Egyptians believed that a body had to be prepared for the afterlife before it could be placed in a tomb. This meant the body had to be preserved. If the body decayed, its spirit could not recognize it. That would break the link between the body and spirit. The *ka* would then be unable to receive the food and drink it needed.

To help the *ka*, Egyptians developed a method called embalming to preserve bodies and to keep them from decaying. Egyptians preserved bodies as **mummies**, specially treated bodies wrapped in cloth. Embalming preserves a body for many, many years. A body that was not embalmed decayed far more quickly.

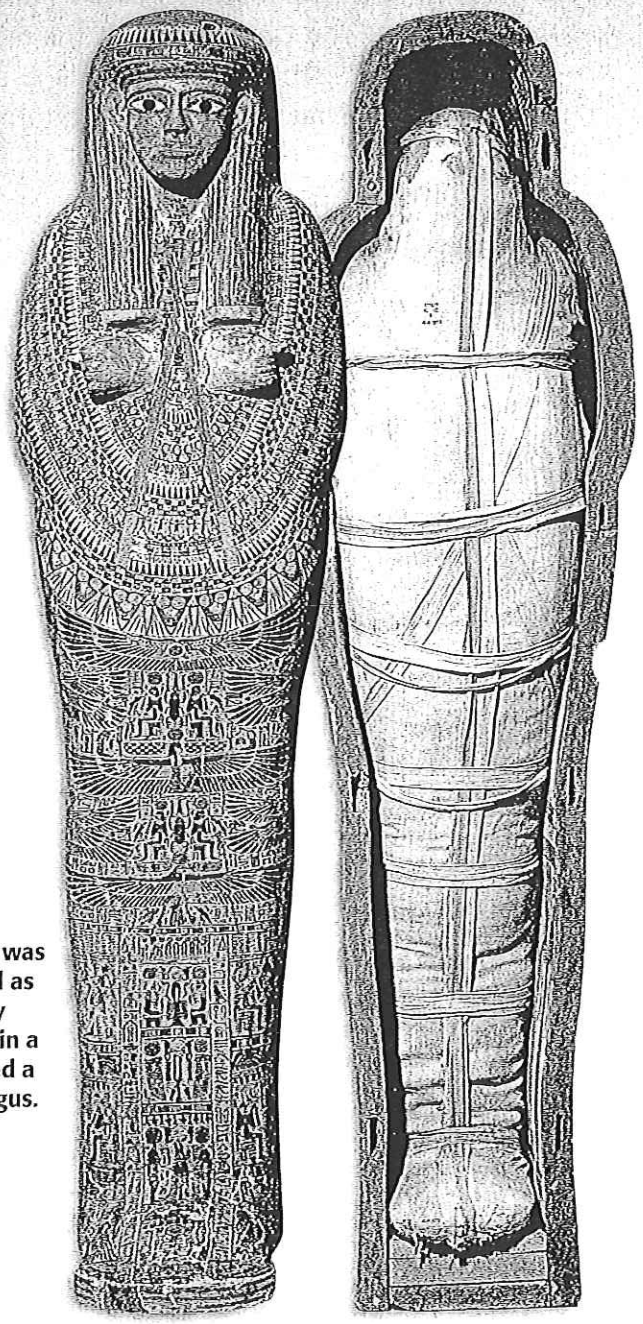
Embalming was a complex process that took several weeks to complete. In the first step, embalmers cut open the body and removed all organs except for the heart.



1 Only the god Anubis was allowed to perform the first steps in preparing a mummy.



2 The body's organs were preserved in special jars and kept next to the mummy.



3 The body was preserved as a mummy and kept in a case called a sarcophagus.

Embalmers stored the removed organs in special jars. Next, the embalmers used a special substance to dry out the body. They later applied some special oils. The embalmers then wrapped the dried-out body with linen cloths and bandages, often placing special charms inside the cloth wrappings.

Wrapping the body was the last step in the mummy-making process. Once it was completely wrapped, a mummy was placed in a coffin called a sarcophagus, such as the one shown at right.

Only royalty and other members of Egypt's **elite** (AY-leet), or people of wealth and power, could afford to have mummies made. Peasant families did not need the process. They buried their dead in shallow graves at the edge of the desert. The hot, dry sand preserved the bodies naturally.

**READING CHECK** **Analyzing** How did religious beliefs affect Egyptian burial practices?

**ANALYSIS SKILL** **ANALYZING VISUALS**

How did gods participate in the afterlife?

## The Pyramids

The Egyptians believed that burial sites, especially royal tombs, were very important. For this reason, they built spectacular monuments in which to bury their rulers. The most spectacular were the **pyramids**—huge, stone tombs with four triangle-shaped sides that met in a point on top.

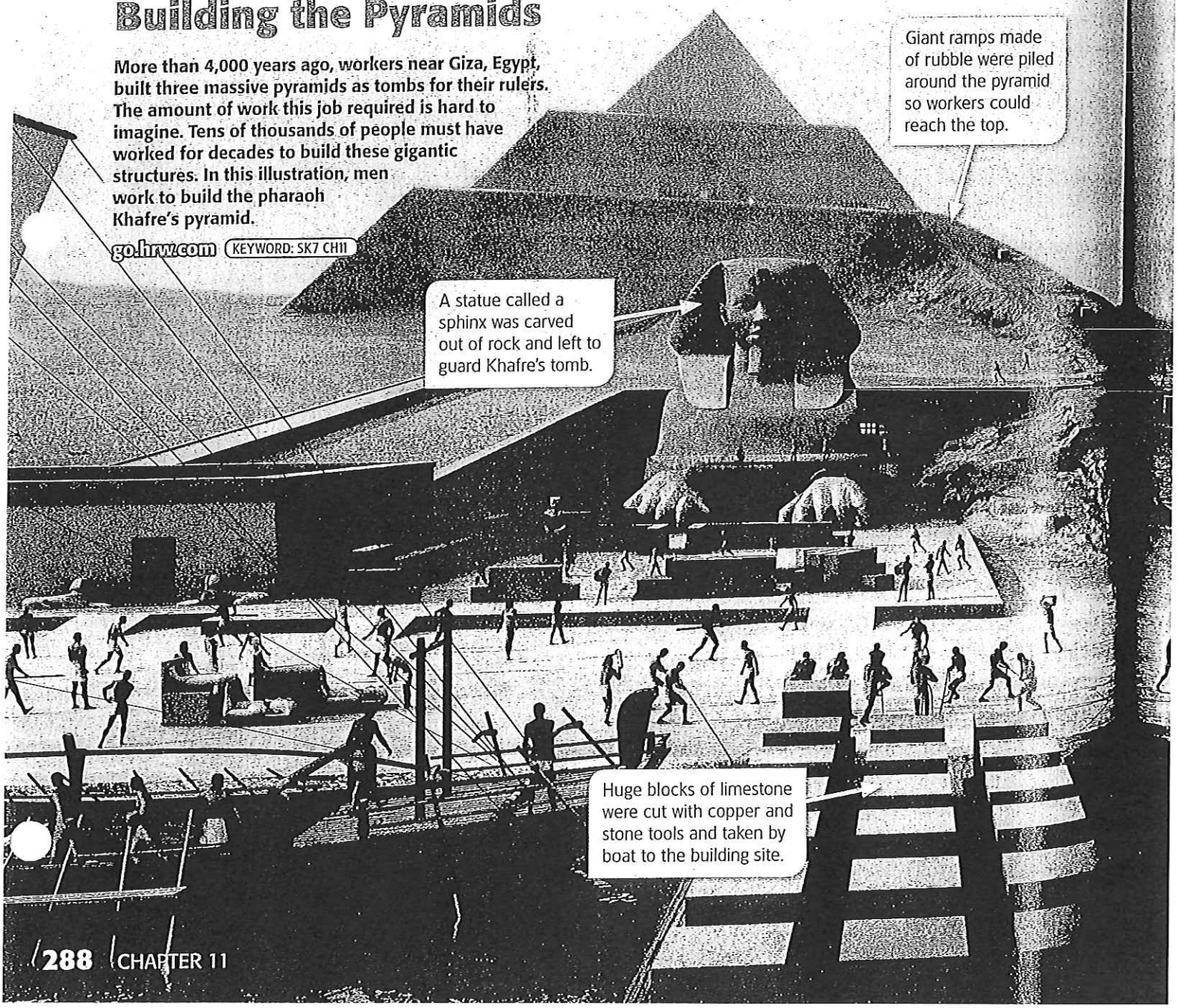
The Egyptians built the first pyramids during the Old Kingdom. Some of the largest pyramids were built during that time. Many of these huge Egyptian pyramids are still standing. The largest is the Great Pyramid of Khufu near the town of Giza. It covers more than 13 acres at its base and stands 481 feet (146 m) high. This one pyramid took thousands of workers and more than 2 million limestone blocks to build. Like all the pyramids, it is an amazing example of Egyptian **engineering**, the application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes.

Interactive Close-up

## Building the Pyramids

**More than 4,000 years ago, workers near Giza, Egypt, built three massive pyramids as tombs for their rulers. The amount of work this job required is hard to imagine. Tens of thousands of people must have worked for decades to build these gigantic structures. In this illustration, men work to build the pharaoh Khafre's pyramid.**

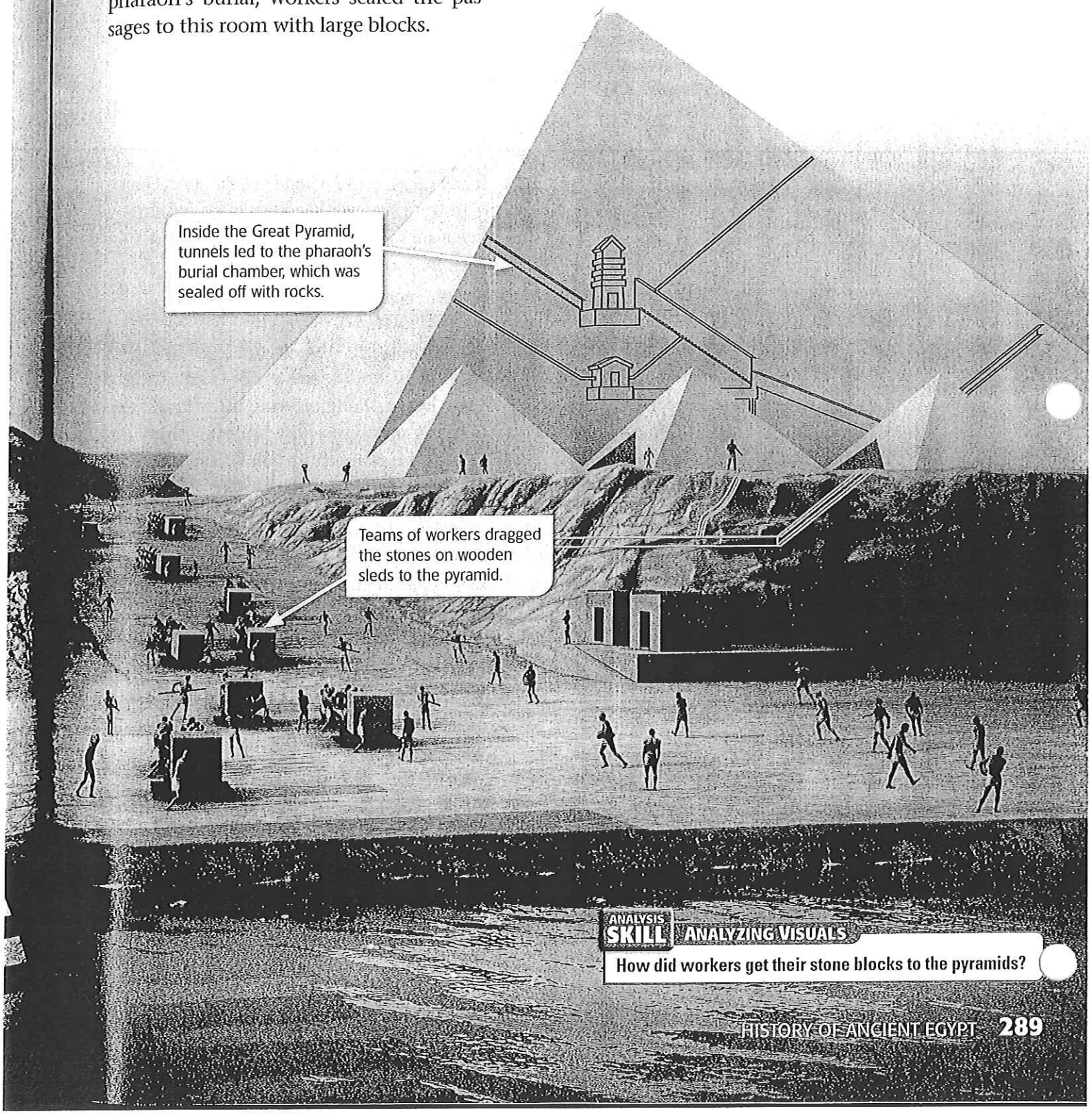
go.hrw.com KEYWORD: SK7 CH11



## Building the Pyramids

The earliest pyramids did not have the smooth sides we usually imagine when we think of pyramids. The Egyptians began building the smooth-sided pyramids we usually see around 2700 BC. The steps of these pyramids were filled and covered with limestone. The burial chamber was located deep inside the pyramid. After the pharaoh's burial, workers sealed the passages to this room with large blocks.

Historians do not know for certain how the ancient Egyptians built the pyramids. What is certain is that such massive projects required a huge labor force. As many as 100,000 workers may have been needed to build just one pyramid. The government paid the people working on the pyramids.




ANALYSIS SKILL **ANALYZING VISUALS**

**How did workers get their stone blocks to the pyramids?**

Wages for working on construction projects were paid in goods such as grain instead of money, however.

For years, scholars have debated how the Egyptians moved the massive stones used to build the pyramids. Some scholars think that during the Nile's flooding, builders floated the stones downstream directly to the construction site. Most historians believe that workers used brick ramps and strong wooden sleds to drag the stones up the pyramid once at the building site.

## Significance of the Pyramids

**FOCUS ON INDIANA**

The shape of the pyramids has inspired many modern architects, including the builders of the distinctly shaped Pyramids business complex in Indianapolis.

Burial in a pyramid showed a pharaoh's importance. Both the size and shape of the pyramid were symbolic. Pointing to the sky above, the pyramid symbolized the pharaoh's journey to the afterlife. The Egyptians wanted the pyramids to be spectacular because they believed the pharaoh, as their link to the gods, controlled everyone's afterlife. Making the pharaoh's spirit happy was a way of ensuring happiness in one's own afterlife.

To ensure that the pharaohs remained safe after death, the Egyptians sometimes wrote magical spells and hymns on tombs. Together, these spells and hymns are called Pyramid Texts. The first such text, addressed to Re, the sun god, was carved into the pyramid of King Unas (OO-nuhs). He was a pharaoh of the Old Kingdom.

> "Re, this Unas comes to you,
> A spirit indestructible . . .
> Your son comes to you, this Unas . . .
> May you cross the sky united in the dark,
> May you rise in lightland, [where] you shine!"
>
> –from Pyramid Text, Utterance 217

The builders of Unas's pyramid wanted the god Re to look after their leader's spirit. Even after death, the Egyptians' pharaoh was important to them.

**READING CHECK** **Identifying Points of View**
Why were pyramids important to the ancient Egyptians?

**SUMMARY AND PREVIEW** As you have read, during the Old Kingdom, new political and social orders were created in Egypt. Religion was important, and many pyramids were built for pharaohs. In the next section you will learn about Egypt's Middle and New Kingdoms.

## Section 2 Assessment

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Online Quiz
KEYWORD: SK7 HP11

### Reviewing Ideas, Terms, and Places

1. **a. Define** To what Egyptian period does the phrase **Old Kingdom** refer?
   **b. Analyze** Why did Egyptians never question the pharaoh's authority?
   **c. Elaborate** Why do you think pharaohs might have wanted the support of **nobles**?
2. **a. Define** What did Egyptians mean by the **afterlife**?
   **b. Analyze** Why was embalming important to Egyptians?
3. **a. Describe** What is **engineering**?
   **b. Elaborate** What does the building of the **pyramids** tell us about Egyptian society?

### Critical Thinking

4. **Generalizing** Using your notes, complete this graphic organizer by listing three facts about the relationship between government and religion in the Old Kingdom.

Government and Religion
1.
2.
3.

**FOCUS ON WRITING**

5. **Noting Characteristics of the Old Kingdom** The Old Kingdom has special characteristics of government, society, and religion. Write down details about any of those characteristics that you might want to include as one of the clues in your Egypt riddle.