Social Aspects of Ancient Egypt

Social Pyramid

-Egyptian society was divided into distinct groups that can often be diagramed in a pyramid type fashion:

- Pharaoh: Egypt’s ruler controlled all of Egypt and was thought to be a god.

- Nobles & Priests: Egypt’s upper class owned most of the farmland and controlled the temples.

- Craftsmen, Merchants, & Scribes: Egypt’s middle class provided goods and services.

- Farmers: Egypt’s lower class provided food and was forced to build monuments and pyramids during Inundation (the flood season).

- Slaves: Egypt’s enslaved people were mainly prisoners of war.

Religion

-Like ancient Mesopotamia, ancient Egypt’s religion was Polytheistic (believed in many gods).

-Gods created the world, controlled the aspects of nature, and controlled the afterlife.

-The Egyptians also believed in an Afterlife, or a life that would continue after death.

-The belief in an afterlife was so strong that the Egyptians Embalmed and Mummified their bodies after they died, and those who could afford it (Pharaohs) had huge tombs, or pyramids built to protect their bodies for the afterlife.

-Much of what we know about Egyptian religion and the afterlife comes from the Book of the Dead, which contains stories, legends, hymns, prayers, and magic spells that were used to help guide a person safely to the afterlife.

-Before a person could enter the afterlife, they were judged by the gods in a ceremony known as the weighing of the heart. During this ceremony, the god Anubis would place the heart of an individual on a scale and weigh it against the “feather of truth”. If the person had lived a good life their heart would weigh less than the feather, but if their heart was heavy with sin, it would weigh more than the feather and they would die a second death from which there was no returning.
Gods & Goddesses

-There were many different gods and goddesses in the Egyptian religion:

-Ra: Sun god, father of the gods, often pictured having a human body, a hawk’s head with a sun over it.

-Amun: Air and wind god, often pictured as a bearded man wearing a cap with two tall plumes. Believed to have merged with Ra to create the all powerful Amun-Ra.

-Osiris: God of the dead, pictured as a bearded man wearing white mummy wrappings holding a flail and a crook.

-Anubis: God who guided the dead and weighed their hearts, pictured as having a human body with a jackal head.

-Isis: Mother goddess of magic and medicine, pictured as a woman with a throne or seat over her head.

-Hathor: Goddess of joy, motherhood, and love, pictured as having the body of a woman with the head of a cow.

-Horus: God of the sky, pictured as having the body of a man with the head of a falcon.

-Khnum: God of water and controller of the Nile, pictured as having the body of a man with the head of a ram.

Mummification

-Step 1: Embalmers removed all the internal organs except the heart and put them in Canopic Jars. The brain was removed by breaking the nose and using a hook to pull out chunks at a time. The liver, lungs, stomach, and intestines were removed through a slit along the left side of the body. The heart was believed to be the center of intelligence and memory, and would be needed in the afterlife.

-Step 2: The body was covered with a type of salt called, natron, for 40 days. This would dry out the body and make sure that all of the internal liquids that could cause the body to decay would be gone.

-Step 3: Embalmers would then remove the natron and coat the body with hot, liquid tree sap and oils. Finally, the body was wrapped in up to 400 yards of linen strips.
-Step 4: Magic amulets, or Scarabs, were place in the wrappings. A scarab placed over the heart of the mummy was believed to guard the heart from speaking out against its owner during the trial in the afterlife.

-Step 5: Most upper class had a large stone coffins, or Sarcophagus, built to safe guard their bodies in the tomb. Often times the Sarcophagus was made to resemble the person, had precious metals and stone embedded in it, and had spells, prayers, and curses carved on it to help protect the body.

-Step 6: The body was placed to rest in the tomb. It the case of the upper class, this would mean placing the body inside of a mastaba or pyramid. Once placed in the burial room of a pyramid, the tomb was sealed by letting huge stones crash into place blocking the main passageways. To fool robbers, some Egyptians pharaohs had traps and false stairs that led to nowhere.