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**The World of
Ancient Egypt**

A Daily Life Encyclopedia

Peter Lacovara

Daily Life Encyclopedias



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See also: *Family and Gender: Family Structure; Social Structure; Primary Documents: Economics and Work/The Hekanakhte Letters*

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FAMILY AND GENDER



INTRODUCTION

The basic building block of ancient Egyptian society was the nuclear family, a fact that was reflected in the Egyptians' religious beliefs, wherein most of the gods were arranged into triads of two parent gods and an offspring. Egyptian gods were integrated into a complex genealogy in what may have been a conscious attempt to rationalize the local cults that likely characterized the tribal communities that existed in Egypt before the unification of the kingdom under the First Dynasty (3000–3890 BCE).

Lineage was traced both through the mother's and father's lines, and veneration of one's ancestors and fidelity to one's parents was a fundamental feature of the fabric of Egyptian society. Children were expected to care for their parents in their old age and to ensure that they received a proper burial and gifts of funerary offerings on feast days. Rather vague kinship terminology sometimes makes interpretation of the records difficult; for example, the term "sister" could refer to a sibling or a wife. Although brother-sister marriage was sometimes found in the royal family, particularly in the New Kingdom (c. 1550–1070 BCE), it does not seem to have been the standard practice and certainly was not in the rest of society.

When a boy reached adolescence, it was deemed appropriate for him to establish his own household. While most marriages were probably arranged within the local communities, literature, particularly a category of writings known as "love songs," indicates that romantic love was held in high regard. Marriage was not a formal bureaucratic or religious institution but a social contract. Dowries were often provided as part of the union. Once the couple was wed, the expectation was that husband and wife would be monogamous; however, men who could afford it could take on concubines or mistresses, and certainly the king was allowed many brides, though there was one principal queen known as the "great royal wife."

Women had greater freedoms than their counterparts in the ancient Near East or even in Greece and Rome. Women were able to request a divorce, to inherit property, and to retain their own assets. In the upper classes, women were largely confined to managing the home and are usually referred to as “lady of the house” (*nbw pr*). Raising children was her principal occupation, and given the infant mortality at the time, many deities were invoked and amulets used to protect the mother and child. Wet nurses could be employed for weaning the child if the mother was unable or unwilling to do so, and a three-year period for suckling a child seems to have been the norm. If the child survived infancy, life expectancy could range anywhere between 30 and 60 years of age, and even longer for the upper classes, who were better fed and cured for.

ADOPTION

For various reasons, such as being childless or for inheritance purposes, ancient Egyptians could draw up a contract to legally adopt someone. A text from Deir el-Medina admonishes a person who has no children to adopt an orphan to act as a genuine eldest son. A prime motivator was to have someone to look after the adoptive parents in their old age. In addition, inheritance laws often favored children, so if there were none and the husband did not wish other relations to receive a share of the community property, he could legally adopt his wife as his child and heir and bequeath all the property to her.

In cases where a slave had children by her master or slaves had endeared themselves to the household, they could be adopted. One adoption decree reads, in part, as follows:

We purchased the female slave Dini-huiri and she gave birth to these three children, one male and two female, in all three. And I took them and nourished them and brought them up, and I have reached this day with them without their doing evil towards me, but they dealt well with me, I having no son or daughter except them . . . if I have fields in the country, or if I have any property in the world, or if I have merchants (?), these shall be divided among my . . . children. (Gardiner, 1940, 23–29)

Adopting a successor was an important way to secure a smooth transition of power in the political arena. The “god’s wives” or “divine votaresses” of Amun in Thebes were the equivalent of Roman vestal virgins, who did not marry and adopted their successors. The office was elevated under the Nubian pharaohs of the 25th Dynasty (712–664 BCE), who installed their sisters in the office as their representatives to rule over Egypt. When the Nubian kings were forced out of Egypt

ADOPTION STELA OF NITOCRIS

Adoption occurred in ancient Egypt, but perhaps the most significant was the adoption of the princess Nitocris as divine votaress of Amun by the 25th Dynasty (712–664 BCE) princess Shepenwepet II. When the Nubian kings lost control of Egypt to the Assyrians and their erstwhile allies, the princes of Sais, the presumptive heir to the important post of divine votaress was Amenirdis II, the daughter of Pharaoh Taharqa (r. 690–664 BCE). However, she was put aside in favor of Nitocris, who was the daughter of Psamtik I (r. 664–610) of the 26th Dynasty (664–525 BCE). With the Nubian rulers of the 25th Dynasty pushed back to their homeland, the princes of Sais then turned on their Assyrian overlords and gained control of Egypt.

As it had before, when Osorkon III’s (r. 787–759 BCE) daughter Shepenwepet I had adopted the Nubian princess Amenirdis I, the adoption process allowed for the smooth transition of power between the dynasties in Thebes. The Adoption Stela was found in the forecourt of the temple of Amun at Karnak and had probably been prominently displayed there. The large granite stela recounts the royal progress of Nitocris down the Nile to take up her new office dressed in royal finery and accompanied by a large flotilla. The stela enumerates all the lands and goods that Nitocris received with the office, including large estates throughout Egypt, which included daily and monthly deliveries of bread and cakes, wine and beer, oxen, geese, and vegetables.

by an Assyrian army, Amenirdis II adopted Nitocris, the daughter of Psamtik I (r. 664–610 BCE) of the 26th Dynasty, as her successor as divine votaress of Amun, saying: “We have given to thee all our property in field and in town. Thou abidest upon our throne, abiding and enduring forever and ever.”

In the case of the royal court, some extraordinary successions took place at the end of the 18th Dynasty (1550–1295 BCE). The official Ay (r. 1327–1323 BCE) succeeded the childless Tutankhamun (r. 1336–1327 BCE) and is shown performing the “opening of the mouth” ceremony that should have been conducted by the pharaoh’s son and heir. Following Ay’s reign, Horemheb (r. 1323–1295 BCE), who also had no issue, selected the general Ptarmessu to succeed him as pharaoh as Ramesses I (r. 1295–1294 BCE), and thus ended the struggle for power that had cast a pall over the end of the 18th Dynasty.

See also: Family and Gender: Family Structure; Kinship and Genealogy; Social Structure

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ANCESTOR WORSHIP

The family unit was of primary importance to an Egyptian's place in the world, and this continued even after death. Egyptians could request their ancestors to protect them against misfortune and evil spirits, and in return the living were supposed to provide deceased relatives with a proper burial, to memorialize their name, perpetuate their memory, and provide sustenance to their spirit. These remembrances were not only for the graveyard; people

would also dedicate statues and stelae in temples and enshrine small busts in their homes to represent and even give a corporeal presence to the departed.

On certain festival days, such as the Beautiful Feast of the Valley, people were obligated to visit the tombs of deceased relatives, where they had a picnic meal as a remembrance. As a safeguard, family members were often represented in the tomb undertaking these actions, which would magically equal the actual performance of these rights. Those wealthy enough could also make a contract with a local temple whereby the priests would carry out these rituals in perpetuity in exchange for land or goods.

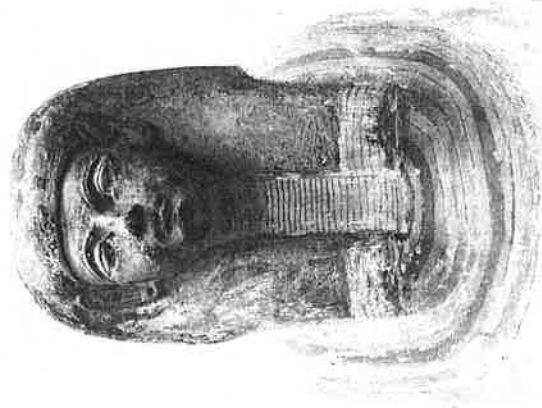
While the Egyptians held the concept of "the self-made man" in highest regard, they

would sometimes claim relationships to famous individuals, such as a priest in Aswan, who claimed his family could be traced back to Imhotep, the Third Dynasty official associated with the construction of the first pyramids and later revered as a philosopher and builder. One's departed ancestors could also be contacted directly to provide help in the world of the living by exercising their special powers of influence beyond the grave. This could be done through prayers or by written messages known as "letters to the dead." These missives could be written on papyrus, pottery vessels, or other objects left in the tomb chapel. One such text, written on a bowl from the site of Hu and now in the Petrie Museum in London, reads as follows:

It is the sister who is saying to her brother, the Only Companion Nefer-sefekhri O, great grief! Useful is a complaint [speaking (?)] concerning this which is done <against> my daughter in such an unjust way, although there is nothing that I have done against him, and (although) I have not eaten of his offerings, (and although) he has not given anything to my daughter. All mortuary sacrifices are made for the enlightened one (Akh) in order to intercede on behalf of the inhabitants of earth. (Therefore) make a decision concerning him who caused that of which I suffered, for I want to be justified in front of the male and the female dead (*mwt mwt.t*) who did this against my daughter. (University College London, 2000)

The Egyptians saw the ritual remembrance of their ancestors, the maintenance of their tombs, and the bringing of offerings as a familial obligation. As a safeguard, so that they would not be forgotten after a generation or two, those wealthy enough could take measures to keep their memory alive for what they aspired to be eternity. Institutionalized memorial services set up through the temples brought about the amassing of huge fortunes in the hands of the priesthood. Statues and stelae were also set up within the temples so that the deceased could also partake in the rituals being performed there. Large and beautiful tombs could also attract visitors, who would ideally say prayers or even leave offerings for the deceased.

The pharaohs were able to go even further to be remembered: the construction of large pyramids and mortuary temples to ensure their fame in perpetuity. However, as important as being remembered was to attaining eternal life, there was always the danger of being forgotten. There was also the danger of *damnatio memoriae*, wherein one's names and images were destroyed by enemies later on. Even whole families could be expunged, such as that of the heretic pharaoh Akhenaten (1353–1336 BCE). Ironically, this is what helped preserve the tomb of Akhenaten's successor Tutankhamun (1336–1327 BCE) and ensure his fame.



Ancestor bust, painted limestone, 19th or 20th Dynasty, British Museum (1843.0507.65). Busts such as this would be set in niches inside the home as a reminder of, and a home for, the spirits of departed ancestors. The busts have an androgynous look so they could represent both male and female relations. (Universal History Archive/UiG via Getty Images)

ANCESTOR BUSTS

Family was important to the ancient Egyptians, and their connection went beyond death. It is thought that small busts that have been found in the village of Deir el-Medina, and perhaps coming from elsewhere, were set up in homes to provide not only a memorial to deceased family members but even a vehicle for them to commune with the family. Over a hundred examples of these small busts are known, and they usually are anonymous, androgynous representations and few have any inscriptions. They are usually referred to as “ancestor busts,” and it is believed that they were placed in niches or small shrines in private homes. Rather than representing a particular person, the generic figures probably represented all the past ancestors of the family and may have also acted as intercessors to the gods on behalf of their living relations.

The busts, which are usually carved of white limestone, are sculpted with a divine wig, a unisex tripartite headdress worn by the gods. Those that preserve painted details often are depicted as wearing a floral broad collar, which was associated with resurrection. One pair of busts is known to have inscriptions—one bust invokes the god Shu, and its mate is inscribed with the name of Shu’s goddess Tefnut. This pair of busts was dedicated to a mother and father and seems to equate the two with the ancient creator gods.

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See also: *Family and Gender: Beautiful Feast of the Valley: Religion and Beliefs: Funerary Ritual; Primary Documents: Family and Gender/A Letter to the Dead*

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BEAUTIFUL FEAST OF THE VALLEY

The ancient Egyptian religious and social calendar was filled with processions and festivals, with as many as 60 celebrated annually in Thebes. The Beautiful Feast of the Valley was one of the most important and one of the most ancient of all religious celebrations, dating back at least to the Middle Kingdom (c. 2030–1640 BCE), which saw the ascendancy of both Thebes and the cult of Osiris. The Beautiful Festival of the Valley was originally held as a remembrance of the dead, but by the New Kingdom (c. 1550–1295 BCE), it was joined with the Festival of Opet. Opet or Ipit was the name for the temple complex of Karnak, and the feast was to commemorate the temple’s principal deity, the great god Amun. It was held during the second month of *Akhet*, the season of the inundation. While the crops and the countryside were under water, the farming population was free to participate in the festival. The joint holy procession became the most important feast in the liturgical calendar.

The events of the festival revolved around fertility and renewal—including the renewal of the deceased. It involved a journey of the god, embodied in his cult statue, and the pharaoh, who was the chief officiator at the celebration. The Opet festival included a procession from Karnak to Luxor Temple along the avenue of sphinxes and back again, while the Feast of the Valley involved a journey across the river to the tombs and temples of the west bank.

The earliest known occurrence of the twinned festivals was during the reign of Hatshepsut (r. 1473–1458 BCE), and it may have been her idea to take the existing rituals and increase their scale and importance to emphasize her connections to the most important gods, Amun and Osiris. She had built in the area of Luxor Temple, and while the site was dedicated to Amun, it was also believed to be the primeval mound of creation and thus sacred to the god in his form as Amun-Min, a fertility god. Unfortunately, nothing of the original Luxor Temple survives except in the form of recycled stones reused in later buildings.

The festival started at Karnak Temple in the holy of holies, where the cult statue of the god Amun was taken out of its *naos* or shrine and bathed, dressed in robes, and bedecked in jewelry of gold, lapis lazuli, and semiprecious stones. It was then placed on a miniature boat or bark. The bark was then carried by priests out of the temple and through the town with great fanfare. Along the processional route, Amun was joined by the cult statues of Mut and Khonsu, the other two gods that formed the Theban Triad with Amun.

The parade was accompanied by priests, fan bearers, musicians, singers, and acrobatic dancers, all watched by the public. Along the way were placed bark-stand way stations where the priests could rest the bark before another cadre of clerics took it up. As the statue passed, the people in the crowds, who would normally never be as close to the god at any other time, could ask the god to intervene

in a court case or help make a decision. The bark, held by the priests, would move in such a way as to say yes or no to the requests. The procession eventually wound up at Luxor Temple or Ipset Resyt ("The Southern Harem"), as Luxor Temple was known. It has been suggested that there is a modern-day survival of the ancient festival in the present-day feast of Sheikh Yūsuf al-Haggāg, which is celebrated with a model boat carried around Luxor Temple.

The Beautiful Feast of the Valley was more of an individual celebration of one's departed ancestors. As part of the feast, family members visited the tombs of their relatives, where they held a picnic type of celebration. People would often cook a meal beside the tomb chapel, where they could be joined by friends and relations who came to pay their respects. In addition to the private visitations, the priests of the temple of Amun at Karnak brought the cult image of the god on its bark in procession to the Nile, where it was then loaded onto the gilded ship *Userhet*, or the "Powerful Prow," which was towed by the king's own boat. *Userhet* was followed by the boats of Amun's consort, Mut, and his son, Khonsu. The flotilla then crossed the river to the west bank. After docking, the procession proceeded up the causeway to the temple of Deir el-Bahri and the chapel of Amun, which was situated on the upper terrace of the temple of Hatshepsut. From there, the image of the god Amun was taken on procession to visit the temple gods of the west and the mortuary temples of the pharaohs. Theban tomb paintings show men and women seated drinking and eating accompanied by music as part of the festival. Food and flowers would be offered in the funerary chapels of private people and the kings. In the 18th Dynasty (1550–1295 BCE) the celebration lasted 11 days, but, by the time of Ramesses II (r. 1279–1213 BCE), it lasted for three weeks.

Another festival celebrating the memory of the departed was the *wag* feast, which was celebrated on the 18th day of the first month of the first season, *Akhet*. Here again, people would celebrate by visiting the tomb chapels and leaving offerings for the deceased, and floral broad collars were worn as symbols of Osiris. The festival included a torch-lit procession on the eve of the feast with the presentation of the offerings made on the following day. The dead were remembered on a number of other feast days as well, and those who could afford it would set up mortuary endowments with the priesthood of the local temple to ensure that they were commemorated on these special days.

See also: Family and Gender: Ancestor Worship; Religion and Beliefs: Funerary Ritual

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CHILDBIRTH

Infant mortality was very high in Egypt, perhaps on the order of one death out of two or three births. This situation was not peculiar to Egypt. In most premodern societies, between 20 and 50 percent of babies did not live through their first year. Mothers who did not have proper nutrition would not have healthy babies and also endangered their own lives with each pregnancy. Though the Nile usually provided ancient Egyptians with a good and varied diet, there is evidence of malnutrition among the lowest classes. They also would have had the highest mortality rate.

The act of giving birth was a difficult and often dangerous process, and there were many spells and amulets to protect both child and mother during this time. Rather than lying down, women delivered their babies in a kneeling or sitting position. This posture was beneficial for a number of reasons. When the mother is upright, gravity can help in bringing the baby down and out. There is also less chance of compressing the mother's aorta and a better chance of ensuring that a good oxygen supply gets to the baby. Upright positioning also enables the uterus to contract more strongly and helps put the baby in a better position to pass through the pelvis. Recent studies have shown that the actual dimensions of the pelvic outlet become wider in a squatting or kneeling posture.

Recently, a birthing brick was discovered at Abydos with painted scenes depicting a mother holding her newborn baby as well as magical images of the deities Hathor and Re in the form of a desert cat, whose role was to protect and aid the mother and baby at the time of birth. Such bricks were associated with the goddess Meskhenet, who was sometimes depicted in the form of a brick with a human head. The delivering mother may have squatted on this brick as she gave birth. Ostraca from Deir el-Medina depict a birthing bower with a garland of vines where the delivery was supposed to have taken place.

Another set of objects closely associated with the birthing process and infancy are the so-called "magical wands," which were usually ivory hippopotamus tusks decorated with scenes of deities and demons, often holding knives. These wands would be used to draw a line in the sand around the bed to keep any harmful creatures from crawling up on it. A number of gods were called upon to protect the mother and baby, including the creator god Khnum, who fashioned humanity on a potter's wheel; Isis and her sister Nephthys, who were positioned at the foot and head to soothe the mother; and Heqat, the frog goddess of magic, to ensure a safe and quick delivery.

These gods are present in the scenes of the divine birth of Hatshepsut (r. 1473–1458 BCE) in her temple at Deir el-Bahri, which celebrated the "immaculate conception" of the queen who became king. In one scene, the god Amun is shown

A BIRTH BRICK

A unique artifact was recently discovered by the University of Pennsylvania Expedition at South Abydos. This so-called "birth brick" is decorated with scenes pertaining to childbirth and protective magic and dates to the Middle Kingdom. It would belong to a class of "apotropaea," objects decorated with protective imagery, such as magical knives or wands, or rods and other amuletic devices. Such objects became increasingly important during the late First Intermediate Period and the Middle Kingdom.

The Abydos birth brick was made from a standard unbaked mud brick that measured about 6.5 inches wide by 13.5 inches long. Painted figures compose scenes on the brick's edges and face, although they are not well preserved. The main scene on the face of the brick depicts a mother and infant seated in the center with two attendant figures, one kneeling before and one standing behind the mother. The scene is flanked by Hathor-head emblems supported on tree trunks painted red-brown with a series of stumps from cut branches protruding from their upper half. The emblems may represent a birthing bower, which seems to have been set up as part of the rituals surrounding childbirth.

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discreetly impregnating Hatshepsut's mother, and then the birth is shown under the watchful gaze of the Seven Hathors, who attend the birth of a child, and then one by one announce aspects of the infant's fate.

Stillborn and newborn infants who lived but a short time were rarely buried in cemeteries, and few graves of such infants have been discovered. They seem to have been placed under thresholds or in pits dug inside the house of their parents. W. M. F. Petrie found boxes containing baby bones under the floors of houses at Lahun. However, Tutankhamun's (r. 1336–1327 BCE) tomb did contain two fetuses in miniature coffins.

See also: *Family and Gender: Infancy and Childhood; Nurses and Tutors; Pregnancy and Fertility; Primary Documents: Family and Gender/A Spell for the Protection of a Child*

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CHILDHOOD. See Infancy and Childhood

COMING OF AGE

Although the life span the ancient Egyptians aspired to was 110 years, it was likely seldom if ever reached. If one survived the first few years of childhood, where mortality could be quite high, most people could look forward to a life span that would reach into the thirties for the lower classes, who were less well fed and housed. However, for the upper classes, life expectancy could reach into the sixties and seventies, and even beyond. For women, the dangers of bearing children resulted in a lower life expectancy for them when compared with men.

Children were cared for in the home by their parents or by nurses and tutors for the wealthy. The remains of toys (although some of these may have been ritual objects) indicates that children were given time to play. After children were weaned, around three years of age, they began their training for the adult world. Girls were expected to help their mothers with running the household or working in the fields. Boys likewise were instructed by their fathers into their profession.

The end of childhood was marked by the onset of menses for girls and the ceremony of circumcision for boys, which was performed at the onset of puberty and which placed a boy within a cohort of boys of the same age. The ceremony was also part of an initiation ceremony that introduced boys in participation in religious mysteries. The circumcision marked the transition from boyhood to manhood.

Young men usually followed in their fathers' footsteps, although in biographical texts it was a standard boast that one attained one's position entirely through one's own merits. Social mobility was possible through education and service in the army, temple, or bureaucracy, which allowed one to move up the ladder of success. Once he had come of age, a young man was expected to take a wife and set up his own household. Although women could achieve a certain amount of wealth and status on their own, being a wife and mother were the expected roles for most young women, who were eligible for marriage from their early teens onward.

See also: *Economics and Work*: Education; Women's Occupations; *Family and Gender*: Childbirth; Family Structure; Infancy and Childhood

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COURTSHIP

The nuclear family was the foundation of ancient Egyptian society. Once a young man came of age, usually in his midteens, it was time to seek out a partner to begin a family. The Egyptian words for marriage were *meni* ("to moor," as with a boat) and *grg pr* ("to establish a house"). In a society where social mobility was restricted and most of the population lived in small farming villages, one's choices were limited. Most matches were probably made between people who grew up together, or through arrangements made by the families, and often to close relations. Census data from the Roman Period revealed that 26 out of a total of 121 recorded marriages were between close kin, 20 brother-sister, 4 half-sibling, and 2 first-cousin marriages. Still, it was not all a case of family mergers, the so-called "love songs" indicate the existence of romance. Here is a spell from the Roman Period wherein a man calls upon the spirit of Emperor Hadrian's drowned lover to aid him in a seduction:

Do not disobey, spirit of the deceased Antinoös, but wake for me and go to every place, every quarter, every house, and bring to me Ptolemais, born by Aias, daughter of Origenous; prevent her from eating, from drinking, until she comes to me, Sarapamonos, born by Area; do not let her know another man, but only me, Sarapamonos; drag her by her hair, by her guts, until she does not leave me anymore, me, Sarapamonos, born by Area, and I own her, Ptolemais, born by Aias, daughter of Origenos, submissive for the whole duration of my life, loving me, desiring me, telling me her thoughts. (Kambitis, 1976, 219)

Marriage was a social contract centered on the exchange of property; unions were not a religious affair nor a matter for the state. Individuals would draw up a "marriage contract" that would specify the dowry brought into the union. Usually, the groom gave the bride's family gifts of various goods, and he also could offer presents to his bride-to-be. The gifts also served as prenuptial agreements in case the marriage ended in divorce. A number of these contracts written on papyrus have survived, mostly from the later periods of Egyptian history. One

example, now in the British Museum, dates to the Ptolemaic Period (304–30 BCE) and spells out the settlement that Pa-igesh would give to the family of his intended, Ta-ti-Imhotep:

The lector-priest of the necropolis of the great town of [] . . . Pa-igesh, son of Pay-bes, whose mother is Ta-ti-Isis, said to the woman Ta-ti-Imhotep, daughter of Pa-ti-Atum, her mother being Tawa: You have satisfied my heart with 21 silver pieces of the Treasury of Ptah, refined, . . . I will give them to you on the day of (your) asking them from me which you shall determine, the day of asking the said 21 silver pieces of the Treasury of Ptah, refined, from me which you shall determine. If I do not give them to you on it, I will give you 52½ (artabas of) . . . barley . . . and 1 silver piece refined of the Treasury of Ptah and 24 hin of oil for your food and clothing yearly (delivered) at the house that you prefer . . . You are the one who is entitled to the remainder of your food and clothing which is my responsibility and I will give them to you without being able to say "I have given you the food and clothing and everything whatsoever" without a legal receipt and without being able to dispute it (?) with you with respect thereto, the above deed remaining in your possession. Everything that I possess and shall acquire is a pledge for your money, your food and clothing aforesaid, until I pay you them in full. (Thompson, 1934, 67–70)

The contract was drawn up by a scribe named Hor-Anubis and was considered a binding legal document. Both spouses would maintain control of the property that they had brought into the marriage, while other property acquired during the union was jointly held. In divorce, the wife could retain her original property. Chastity was not a requirement for the bride and groom; however, once married, the couple was expected to be sexually faithful, and tales of retribution spelled out the misfortunes that would befall a philanderer. Remarriage did occur after divorce or the death of a spouse, and some people appear never to have married at all.

See also: *Family and Gender*: Divorce and Remarriage; Incest; Kinship and Genealogy; Marriage; Sexuality; *Primary Documents*: Family and Gender/Household Hints: The Instruction of Any from Papyrus Boulaq 4; Family and Gender/Love Songs

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DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

While the institution of marriage was held in high regard in ancient Egypt, divorce does not seem to have been uncommon nor did it carry much stigma. Divorce proceedings could be instigated by either partner for a number of reasons, including adultery, the inability to conceive, or incompatibility.

Because marriage in ancient Egypt was essentially a business contract, the dissolution of a union required the division of assets. If it was the wife who chose to divorce her husband, she was entitled to what she had brought into the marriage plus a share, usually one-third or up to two-thirds, of the joint property. If it was the husband who ended the marriage, he could be liable for alimony and could also forfeit his part of the joint property.

A letter from the late Ramesside Period (12th century BCE) describes how a man announces his intention to divorce his wife by saying, "I am separating myself from you." A simple declaration is all that may have been needed to bring about the separation. A joke from Deir el-Medina goes as follows:

You are like the story of the woman blind in one eye who was in the house of a man for twenty years, and he found another and he said to her, 'I will divorce you! Why, you are blind in one eye!' And she said to him, is this the discovery you have made these twenty years that I have spent in your house? (McDowell, 1999, 31–32)

In divorce, women usually kept their own property as stipulated in most marriage contracts. If they had had means of their own when marrying, they could continue an independent existence, otherwise they might seek charity or their parents' help. Ostrakon Petrie 61 records the following:

The Workman Horemwia says to the Citizeness Tent-desheret, his daughter: You, my goodly daughter, should the Workman Baki cast you out of the house that (he) has made (for you), as for the house . . . you shall sit in the gateway of my storehouse, that which I have made myself, and no one in the land shall cast you out from there. (Černý and Gardiner, 1957, 23.4)

Childlessness may have caused a man to leave his wife to try and find a fertile partner, but the *Instruction of Ankhsheshonq* counsels men: "Do not abandon a woman of your household when she has not conceived a child" (Lichtheim, 1980, 170).

A major cause of divorce seems to have been adultery, although it appears that married men could engage in relations with women other than their wives. However, it was taboo to have intercourse with another man's wife. It would appear that the punishment for that was death. The stigma of adultery did not seem to affect the offspring of the encounter. The concept of illegitimacy did not seem to exist, and it was only the paternity of a child that was important. Women, too, had the ability to end

a relationship. An account from Deir el-Medina records that an independent woman ended her relationship with a man, and he complained: "And they threw me out, although she had not made for me (even?) a garment for my behind . . ." (McDowell, 1999, 46).

Death in childbirth claimed many wives, and widowers could remarry as well. Often, older men who lost their wives remarried, sometimes to much younger women. Widows often brought with them inherited wealth, which made them good prospects. Some women could even outlive multiple husbands, as shown in the New Kingdom (c. 1550–1295) tomb of Nebamun and his brother Ipuki, where a scene shows Henunefert mourning at the feet of her two husbands' coffins. Often a widow or widower married a sibling of their deceased spouse.

See also: Family and Gender: Courtship; Family Structure; Incest; Marriage

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FAMILY STRUCTURE

The concept of the nuclear family was so interwoven into the belief system in ancient Egypt that the gods are frequently depicted as a triad consisting of father, mother, and child. The larger interactions of the gods also reflected family dynamics in many ways, and many of the myths associated with the gods had them acting out familial dramas. Like most other ancient cultures, Egyptian society was patriarchal. The men and their male heirs controlled much of the wealth and property; however, women did have equal status in many areas and were far freer than most of their contemporaries in the rest of the world. Women owned property and businesses and had a voice in family matters. By far, the most common female title that is encountered is that of "mistress of the house." This position of housewife implied that the woman remained in the home and was responsible for the running of the household. This situation is evidenced by the tomb scenes of every period, where women are shown engaged in household chores, such as meal preparation, and in other domestic tasks, such as weaving and craft production within the house compound. Her most important function, though, was the rearing of children.

Just as parents were expected to look after children, so then it became the duty of the eldest son, or occasionally daughter, to care for the parents in their old age. This was true to such an extent that the son was often called “the staff of his father’s old age.” It was the son’s responsibility to ensure that his parents received the proper burial and memorials. In cases where there was no one to care for the elderly, adoption was a quite common solution for childless couples.

Because many of the personal documents that survive from ancient Egypt record the disposition of property, these give us some insight into the makeup of the family structure. Households often consisted not only of the nuclear family but of an extended group of relatives and servants, particularly on larger estates. Although the nuclear family is at the center of inheritance patterns, the extended family and household could also be included in bequests and would have participated in the day-to-day duties of property management.

Texts refer to extended kin and household groups as *mhwt* and *whyt*, which mean something like “clan.” These groups could also manifest themselves in neighborhoods or even in coresidency on larger estates. Over time, of course, the household increased in size and relationships, and status and available space similarly affected whether children, once married, continued to live in the parents’ house or set up another for themselves.

The Hekanakht Letters show that Hekanakht’s household included at least 18 people: sons, a second wife or concubine, his mother, and several others, including possibly an aunt or sister, as well as servants. The Kahun Papyrus gives us an idea of how families grew together and indicates that the married pair was often not only responsible

for their own children but also for unmarried relations and surviving members of the previous generation and even family retainers. Bonds linking servants to their patron’s household were often marked by the use of kinship terms; sometimes male servants were even described as the “sons” of the head of the house. In some cases, the situation was even formalized by means of legal contracts, including adoptions.

Archaeological evidence in the form of the remaining floor plans of Egyptian houses gives some clues to the spatial organization of families. This evidence can be correlated with textual information from sites like the towns of Kahun, El-Amarna, and Elephantine, which gives us an idea of the room sizes, functions, and furnishings of various households. The range of house sizes even within these communities is vast, but on average we might estimate that the number of people living in a small to medium house would have been around six, with two or three children living with their parents and one or two more people who were either dependent relatives or servants also resident in the home.

Censuses from the Greco-Roman Period (after about 300 BCE) show that a typical Egyptian household included two adults and two children on average. Wills show that often houses were divided up among heirs, and we can see frequent alterations in mud-brick domestic structures that attest to growth and change over time.

See also: *Arts: Domestic Architecture; Family and Gender: Genealogy and Kinship; Social Structure; Primary Documents: Family and Gender/Fatherly Advice in the Papyrus Insinger; Family and Gender/Household Hints: The Instruction of Any from Papyrus Boulaq 4*

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FERTILITY. See Pregnancy and Fertility

GENEALOGY. See Kinship and Genealogy

INCEST

Although brother-sister relationships were common in Egyptian mythology and, at times, within the royal family, such unions were, in fact, probably rare



Statue of the dwarf Seneb with his wife, Sentiotes, and children, Giza, painted limestone, 5th–6th Dynasty, Egyptian Museum, Cairo (JE 51280). The nuclear family was the central unit of Egyptian society. (DEAG. Dagli Orti/De Agostini/Getty Images)

in ancient Egyptian society. There may have been some brother and sister marriages, but more likely than not the siblings in question would have been half-brothers and half-sisters. The problem in interpretation of the data arises from the limited Egyptian terms of kinship, which are often very confusing. A "father" could refer to the actual father, the grandfather, or male ancestors, while "mother" could have the same meanings for the females of the family. "Sister" could mean a lover, a wife, a mistress or concubine, or a niece or aunt! Marriages between close kin, however, appear to have been commonplace in the general population. Stepbrothers and sisters married, as did uncles and nieces, and, even more frequently, cousins. Even today marriages between first cousins are a regular occurrence in Egypt.

The prevalence of brother-sister marriages within the New Kingdom royal family in the 18th (1550–1295 BCE) and 19th Dynasties (1295–1186 BCE) was remarkably frequent and included such pharaohs as Seqenenre Tao II, Ahmose I, Amenhotep I, Thutmose I, Thutmose IV, Akhenaten, Tutankhamun, Ramesses II, Merenptah, and Siptah. This practice may have been an attempt to reinforce the links among members of the royal family, particularly on occasions where the male claimant to the throne was the son of a minor wife, who would marry his step-sister, a daughter of the great royal wife. It has also been suggested that it was to mimic the gods, who themselves frequently indulged in brother-sister unions. For example, the sibling deities Shu and Tefnut gave birth to two offspring, Geb and Nut, who in turn paired off and had children of their own who begat Isis, Osiris, Nephthys, and Seth, who also formed incestuous relationships.

More difficult to explain is the union of father and daughter as occurred with the pharaohs Amenhotep III (r. 1390–1352 BCE), Akhenaton (r. 1353–1336 BCE), and Ramesses II (r. 1279–1213 BCE) and their daughters, though scholars have suggested that the title of daughter was merely honorific in these cases. Consanguineous relations are generally tabooed because such inbreeding jeopardizes the fitness of the offspring and increases their chance for homozygosity or the possession of two identical forms of a particular gene, which enables the expression of dangerous defects and genetic disorders. The results of inbreeding in the 18th Dynasty have been suggested as the cause of a number of illnesses and disorders that were identified in a recent examination of the mummy of Tutankhamun (r. 1336–1327 BCE). These defects included a deformed foot caused by a degenerative bone disease, a cleft palate, and a curved spine.

While evidence for incest among the general populace during the Dynastic Period is lacking, such unions are well attested in the Greco-Roman Period (after about 300 BCE) as recorded in papyrus documents. Such marriages were also more common at this point among Egyptian royalty. While before the reign of the Ptolemies (304–30 BCE) there seem to have been only cases of half-sibling

incest in the royal family, a new tradition was started when Arsinoe wed her full brother Ptolemy II (r. 285–246 BCE); this full-sibling marriage earned Ptolemy the nickname "Philadelphos," "brother loving." This marriage may have been meant to establish a dynastic cult that was echoed in the Isis and Serapis cult established by the Ptolemies, a Greek dynasty, as a means to unify the native population and the resident Greeks. Their descendants continued this tradition, and of the 13 Ptolemies who came to throne, seven entered into full brother-sister marriages.

Texts from the Roman Period in Egypt suggest there was a widespread practice of sibling marriages found throughout all social classes. It has been estimated that one-third, and perhaps more, of all men had married their sisters. Some have suggested that such marriages were entered into to keep the family's assets together.

See also: Family and Gender: Family Structure; Kinship and Genealogy; Marriage; Sexuality

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INFANCY AND CHILDHOOD

In ancient Egypt, infancy was a difficult time, and children seem to have not been named at birth but only after a period of time to see if they would survive. Children would be named after their parents, the king, particular gods, or even for their physical qualities, geographic origin, or family occupations. After the child was named, he or she was registered in the "house of life," which was a records office associated with palaces and temples.

Babies stayed with their mother, often carried in a sling around her neck or as a papoose attached to her back. The baby would nurse for a period of around three years. The royal court and the wealthy could employ the services of a wet nurse if need be. Feeding bottles or cups for children have been found, and mother's milk is named as a frequent ingredient for remedies found in the medical papyri, which

also contain cures for childhood illnesses, such as ear infections. One of these spells reads as follows:

Run out, thou who comest in darkness, who enterest in [stealth (?)], his nose behind him, his face turned backward, who loses that for which he came.
Run out, thou who comest in darkness, who enterest in [stealth (?)], her nose behind her, her face turned backward, who loses that for which she came.
Comest thou to kiss this child? I will not let thee kiss him.
Comest thou to soothe (him)? I will not let thee soothe him.
Comest thou to harm him? I will not let thee harm him.
Comest thou to take him away? I will not let thee take him away from me.
I have made his protection against thee out of Efet-herb, it makes pain; out of onions, which harm thee; out of honey which is sweet to (living) men and bitter to those who are yonder (i.e., the dead); out of the evil parts of the Ebdw-fish; out of the jaw of the meret; out of the backbone of the perch. (Breasted, 1912, 291)

Amulets were often tied to each part of a child's body to protect it, and a different deity was associated with the protection of different body parts. Protective spells were written on papyrus, rolled up, and placed in a pendant worn around the child's neck. Depictions of children usually show them naked, or, sometimes, young girls sported only beaded girdles around their waists. Children's hair was shaven, with only one tuft worn in a braided plait, usually on the right side of the head, with the end rolled up in a curl, known as the "side lock" of youth. Even royal children and gods were shown with such a braid.

Children are also shown at play, wrestling or playing games that seem like modern piggy-back, ring-around-the-rosy, and leapfrog. Balls, tops, pull toys, and board games were also used by children at



Children are often depicted with shaved heads, wearing the side lock of youth. Here the prince Amen-hor-khepeshef, son of Ramesses III, is depicted in his tomb standing behind his father. (Heritage Image Partnership Ltd./Alamy Stock Photo)

INFANT FEEDING CUP

Babies and small children could be fed liquids from a small cup with a pinched spout. They were usually made of clay, but one example is in faience and is decorated with images of many of the monsters and demons found on the so-called "magic wands," which were used for the magical protection of mothers and infants. Depicted on the exterior of such a cup now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art are a turtle, prowling lion, a serpent, a long-necked mythical animal, a knife, an upright standing lion brandishing a snake wand, two images of the god Bes, a human figure, and the goddess Taweret.

The cup was not found in a tomb but placed in a small basket along with a magical figure of a crocodile; it was buried in the ground in the area of the cemetery west of the pyramid of Amenemhet I (r. 1981–1952 BCE) at Lisht. It may have actually come from one of the houses that had been built over the tombs there.

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Metropolitan Museum of Art. "Feeding Cup." Late Middle Kingdom, ca. 1850–1700 BCE. <http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/545936>. Accessed June 10, 2016.

play, at least those children with the time to engage in them. Most children, however, were expected to spend their time running errands, feeding animals, sowing seed, harvesting, and gleanings. Girls worked in the kitchen, baking bread and assisting in preparing meals. Children were also responsible for looking after their younger siblings, as is noted in the Hekanakhte Letters.

Children often learned their adult occupations as apprentices working beside their parents to follow in their footsteps; many professions seem to have passed down from one generation to the next. Only the children of the wealthiest families were sent to school. Scribal schools attached to the palace and temples taught writing, record keeping, and the performance of requisite rituals.

There was no specific age at which a youngster transitioned to adulthood, but circumcision may have been the point of transition for boys. Men often went out to establish their own households, while unmarried women remained in the family home. Sons and daughters were obligated to care for their parents in their old age. The sayings of the scribe Any instructed children to return the devotion their mothers showed to them: "Double the food your mother gave you. Support her as she supported you. She had a heavy load in you, but she did not abandon you" (Lichteim, 1976, 141).

See also: *Family and Gender*: Childbirth; Family Structure; Social Structure; *Primary Documents*: Family and Gender/Household Hints: The Instruction of Any from Papyrus Boulaq 4; Family and Gender/A Spell for the Protection of a Child

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KINSHIP AND GENEALOGY

While one's identity in ancient Egypt centered on one's family and lineage, many of the kinship terms used by Egyptians were vague and overlapping, at least by our understanding. While many of the genealogical lists that are recorded on tombs, stelae, and other documents indicate how important ancestry was, there are very few terms to identify blood relatives beyond the immediate family. For example, the word *mw* for "mother" could also be used for "grandmother" or "mother-in-law"; and the word *it* for "father" was the same as "grandfather" and could also be used for "father-in-law" or even "teacher" or "guardian." Similarly, the word *sa* could mean "son," "grandson," or "nephew," and *sat* could be "daughter," "granddaughter," or "niece." "Uncle" and "brother," or "sister" and "aunt," were also defined by the same term. Still more confusing, the terms "sister" and "brother" were used as terms of affection for unrelated people and husbands and wives. The terms *hi*, "husband," and *hmt*, "wife," appear to have more specific meaning and circumscribed usage. This oversimplified terminology makes it difficult at times to determine who was who within the family structure.

People are usually identified in inscriptions by their parents, either one or both, and sometimes the importance of noting the filiations to either the mother or father varies over time. It is also the case that some families may appear larger than they actually were, if some members labeled with kinship terms, like "son" or "daughter," were actually grandchildren, or the spouse's children by another marriage. Yet another problem in determining familial relationships is that the same names were often used over the generations, though, in some cases, the Egyptians added glosses, such as the terms "the younger" or "the elder" to make the relationships clearer.

Much early anthropological research focused on the analysis of kinship systems. Both ancient and modern societies classify kinship relations differently and

employ different terminology. As an example, some cultures distinguish between affinal relationships (by marriage) and consanguine relationships (by blood), where others do not. Some kin terminologies can be extremely specific, such as the modern Sudanese system, which is classified as a "descriptive" system wherein relationships are defined according to genetic distance and gender; for example, for cousins, there are eight possible terms or classifications. Categorizing extinct kinship systems from the archaeological record is an even more difficult undertaking.

Therefore, it is not surprising that there is little scholarly agreement as to the nature of ancient Egyptian kinship and how it might be defined. Some Egyptologists have attempted to define pharaonic kinship based on systems defined by Western anthropology. Since the Egyptian rule of royal succession ideally went from father to son, or brother to brother, this would suggest a patrilinear system. Others, however, have noted the importance attached to matrilinearity, since descent was also traced through the mother and preeminence was given to the son(s) of the great royal wife.

It has been suggested that this may be the possible explanation for the pattern of heirs to the Egyptian throne marrying their sisters or half-sisters, particularly when the male heir was not the son of the great royal wife, as was probably the case with Tutankhamun (r. 1336–1327 BCE). The union with the daughter of the principal queen would strengthen the legitimacy of the heir's claim on the kingship. This idea is not universally accepted, however, and does not explain the father-daughter marriages in the royal families of the New Kingdom (c. 1550–1070 BCE).

Others have suggested that these incestuous marriages were a way for the pharaohs to underscore their divine status because the gods' mythological genealogies involved many brother-sister and father-daughter marriages. Still another theory is that marriage between two members of the royal family cut down on collateral branches and potential rivals for the throne.

In ancient (and modern) Egypt, first-cousin marriages were not uncommon, and men also often married a deceased wife's sister. As with the crown, polygamous unions did take place, particularly with men wealthy enough to support secondary wives or concubines, as in the case of Hekanakhte. Many of these relationships were intended to produce a male heir, though another route for obtaining heirs was adoption. These exigencies all impacted on family and social organization and might not be reflected in the standard kinship terminology.

While only immediate kin are usually represented on monuments and in documents from the Old Kingdom (c. 2575–2150 BCE) and throughout most of later dynastic history, extended genealogies become important in defining oneself in the Third Intermediate Period (c. 1070–653 BCE) and the Late Period (c. 664–343 BCE), possibly as a reaction to immigration and invasion. The Egyptians were also

not averse to embroidering their ancestry; in one inscription, a priest in the Aswan region traces his family back over 2,000 years to the divine Imhotep!

See also: Family and Gender: Ancestor Worship; Family Structure; Incest; Social Structure; Wives and Husbands; Primary Documents: Economics and Work/The Hekanakhte Letters

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MARRIAGE

Once children reached adulthood, it was usual to select a spouse, though there seems to have been no specifically set age. Boys were circumcised sometime in their early teens, and girls were often considered of marriageable age by 13 or shortly after the beginning of menstruation. There seems to be no specific marriage ceremony, but contracts were frequently written and dowries were an expected part of the union. It was usual for the father of the bride to compensate her future husband. An example of a dowry included in a marriage contract is this agreement between Apollonius and Thermion from the early Roman Period (c. 30 BCE):

To: Protarchus

From: Thermion, daughter of Apion, along with her guardian Apollonius, son of Chaereas; and from Apollonius, son of Ptolemaeus Thermion and Apollonius, son of Ptolemaeus agree that they have come together to share a common life. And the said Apollonius, son of Ptolemaeus, acknowledges that he has received from Thermion by hand from the house a dowry of a pair of gold earrings weighing three quarters and [- -] silver drachmai. And from now on, Apollonius, son of Ptolemaeus, shall provide Thermion as his wife all necessities and clothing in proportion to his means and shall not mistreat her, nor throw her out, nor bring in another wife, or he shall directly forfeit the dowry increased by half with right of execution upon both the person of Apollonius, son of Ptolemaeus, and all his property as if by legal decision. And Thermion shall fulfill her duties towards her husband and their common life and shall not leave the house for a night or a day without the consent of Apollonius, son of Ptolemaeus, nor dishonor, nor injure

their common home, nor consort with another man, or she—if guilty of any of these deeds—shall after trial, forfeit the dowry, and in addition the guilty party shall be liable to the prescribed fine. 17th year of Caesar, Pharmouthi 20. (Hunt and Edgar, 1932)

These contracts usually stipulated how the husband would be responsible for feeding and clothing his wife and their children and the right of the children to inherit his wealth. If the marriage ended in divorce, the wife was entitled to her dowry and up to one-third of the joint property accrued during the marriage, along with any other provisions for divorce written in the marriage contract.

Marriages in ancient Egypt seem ideally to have been lifelong monogamous unions; however, there is evidence of a man having more than one partner. The word *hmt* is translated as "wife," while *hbswt* connotes a "concubine," although there is some confusion about these terms. The Hekanakhte Letters quite specifically



Stele of Nenu, painted limestone, First Intermediate Period. Intermarriage between different races and nationalities was unremarkable in ancient Egypt. This tomb stela depicts the Nubian soldier Nenu and his Egyptian wife with their children at their feet. (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts, USA (03.1848)/Purchased by A. M. Lythgoe/Bridgeman Images)

STELA OF NENU

Egyptians were free to marry non-Egyptians, and intermarriage was common in the border areas of the Delta and southern Upper Egypt. The Stela of Nenu, which probably came from the site of Gebelein, dates to the First Intermediate Period and depicts Nenu, a Nubian soldier, his wife, Sekhat-Hor, and their children and hunting dogs. It is a funerary stela, which would have been set up in a tomb chapel at the burials of the family. It is inscribed with an offering formula, and a servant is shown offering Nenu a drink.

Nubians were renowned archers and often served in the Egyptian army. Nenu is depicted as a Nubian with a darker skin tone and wearing a traditional costume that included a wide leather sash and curly wig and holding a bow and quiver of arrows. His wife is positioned behind him and shown wearing the characteristic Egyptian sheath dress and long wig, and both wear Egyptian-style broad collars. The youngest child before them also wears a leather sash and a tufted hairstyle characteristic of Nubia. The rough stela is carved in a provincial style typical of the First Intermediate Period.

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Museum of Fine Arts Boston. "Stele of the Nubian Soldier Nenu." First Intermediate Period, 2100–2040 BCE. <http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/stele-of-the-nubian-soldier-nenu-130332>. Accessed June 10, 2016.

mention taking care that the mistress of the head of the household is not mistreated while he was away.

Polygamy was common among the kings and some of the elite. There was one principal queen, the *hmt nswt wrt* ("great royal wife"), who was supposed to bear the royal heir and could be a sister to further ensure the purity of the royal bloodline. If a king did not have a clear claim to the throne, marrying the daughter of the former ruler would cement his right to rule. Additional wives could be taken to cement relationships through diplomatic marriages with daughters of rulers of foreign countries or even with powerful local leaders. Brother-sister marriage or even relations between father and daughter could take place to help secure title to rule, particularly if there was a stepson by a minor wife who needed to underscore his legitimacy by wedding a daughter of the king and his principal queen. Also, a non-royal could be legitimized by marrying the widow or daughter of a previous king.

The tradition of brother-sister or father-daughter marriages was mostly confined to the Egyptian ruling house and was not always practiced. In Egyptian mythology,

marriage between brother and sister divinities and between fathers and daughters was a standard trope. While people have suggested this would cause severe abnormalities in their offspring, it usually takes many generations of inbreeding to actually cause significant congenital defects.

Marriage between cousins, or uncles and nieces, was found among the common people; such unions were usually arranged and were most often between people of the same social class. On the other hand, there seems to have been no obstacle as far as race or nationality went in marriage. It was not unusual for an Egyptian to marry a Nubian or even someone from another country, such as Syria or Libya.

See also: Family and Gender: Courtship; Divorce and Remarriage; Incest; Family Structure; Social Structure; Wives and Husbands; Primary Documents: Economics and Work/The Hekanakhte Letters; Family and Gender/Household Hints: The Instruction of Any from Papyrus Boulaq 4; Family and Gender/A Marriage Contract

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NURSES AND TUTORS

The royal court, and presumably those private individuals wealthy enough to afford the luxury, could employ nurses and tutors to look after their children. The word *mn't* is used for a nurse and is determined with a breast, suggesting it originated with wet nurses but appears to have been extended to all child caregivers, even males. A similar term for nurse, *atyf*, seems to refer more broadly to nurses and tutors.

Royal nurses and tutors were often individuals held in high regard; a recently discovered large statue of a nurse with four children on her lap is now on display in the Cairo Museum. Tutankhamun's (r. 1336–1327 BCE) wet nurse, Maia, was provided with a tomb carved with beautiful reliefs at Saqqara. Hatshepsut's (r. 1473–1458 BCE) daughter, Neferure, was tutored by some of the highest officials in the land, including the high steward and chief architect Senenmut.

While nurses and tutors must have served the royal family in earlier periods, the specific titles identifying people as "royal nurse" (*mn't nswt*) or "royal tutor" (*mn't nswt*), only seem to occur during the 18th Dynasty (1550–1295 BCE). For this period, we have records of about 45 individuals who were nurses and tutors during the period between the reign of Ahmose (r. 1550–1525 BCE) and that of

Akhenaten (r. 1353–1336 BCE). One king could have a number of guardians, and the young prince Amenhotep II (r. 1427–1400 BCE) seems to have had a particularly large number.

We do not have information on the specific roles that the royal nurses and tutors played, or on how these positions were filled, but the depictions we do have in painting, relief, and statuary show a nurse or tutor holding and cuddling one or more of the royal children. This unusual representation, showing a nonroyal person in close physical contact with a member of the royal family, is unprecedented in Egyptian art. Some images show a nurse or tutor holding their charge depicted as a miniature ruler rather than as a child. The affectionate gestures rendered in these images underscore the close bond that existed between the nurses and tutors and their nurslings.

The title “one who nurtured the god” attests to the fact that this relationship was given a particular honor. It may have been that women of the royal court who had recently given birth were chosen as wet nurses, while the men who were chosen as tutors acted as a combination of guardian and teacher. Another title of “foster brother/sister” may reflect the position of individuals who acted more as a companion and a peer rather than a teacher or guardian.

It is likely that some of the individuals who were appointed to be nurses and tutors had royal blood and may have belonged to lesser branches of the royal family. Although they may have owed their elevated status to their association with the pharaoh, it is true that even among the general populace that nurses and tutors were held in high regard. Documents from Deir el-Medina show that nurses were highly paid. Given the proportion of women who died in childbirth, there was probably a wide demand for wet nurses. Employment contracts for nurses have survived from the Late Period (r. 664–343 BCE) and attest to the esteem in which they were held and the salaries they commanded.

See also: Family and Gender: Family Structure; Infancy and Childhood

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OLD AGE

While the ancient Egyptians often referred to the ideal life span as 110 years, it is unlikely that any really attained it, although there is evidence that some fortunate

few lived into their eighties and nineties. However, the average life span was much shorter, only into the fifties, if that. Most individuals are represented in Egyptian art as being in the prime of life, and very few sculptures and two-dimensional images depict an aged countenance. Through cosmetics and makeup, people tried to appear youthful, and the medical papyri even contain remedies for removing or coloring gray hair.

Old age is lamented in the “Maxims of Ptahhotep” as follows:

Age is here, old age arrived, Feebleness come, weakness grows, Childlike one sleeps all day, Eyes are dim, ears deaf, Strength is waning through weariness. The mouth, silenced, speaks not. The heart, void, recalls not the past. The bones ache throughout. (Lichtheim, 1973, 62–63)

Retirement from office is indicated in the rations for the workers at Deir el-Medina, where the elderly of the community were given reduced rations. In a papyrus from el-Lahun, a father seeks to guarantee the appointment of his son to his position in the temple administration so that in return his son could act as a “staff of old age” for his father. Many high officials remained in office until they were quite elderly. In the case of the king, the *heb-sed* or jubilee festival was celebrated (ideally) after 30 years of reigning to show the pharaoh was still vigorous and capable of ruling. In some cases, the pharaoh would take on his son and heir to be coregent, both as an aid to cope with the burdens of office but more importantly to ensure a smooth transition of power.

Women who outlived their husbands may have been in difficult straits and dependent on the community. The “Negative Confessions” often state that the individual has acted in an upstanding manner and announces, “I am one who speaks for the widow on the day of judging, heard the pleas of the widow and I am one who protects the widow.”

The Egyptians respected the elderly and their accumulated wisdom from their years of labor and knowledge acquisition and regarded the attainment of old age as evidence of divine favor and the fruit of a blameless life. The Instruction of Any says, “Do not sit when another one is standing. One who is older than you” (Lichtheim, 1976, 138).

Papyrus Isinger describes the attainment of age as follows:

He [a man] spends ten (years) as a child before he understands death and life. He spends another ten (years) acquiring the instruction by which he will be able to live. He spends another ten years earning and gaining possessions by which to live. He spends another ten years up to old age, before his heart takes counsel. There remain sixty years of the whole life, which Thoth has assigned to the man of god. (Lichtheim, 1980, 199)

See also: *Family and Gender: Ancestor Worship, Family Structure; Primary Documents: Family and Gender/Fatherly Advice in the Papyrus Insinger*

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PERSONAL NAMES

Children may not have received their names right at birth; we have a number of examples where infants were buried unnamed. At whatever time the child had passed through what was thought to be the most dangerous time for infant survival a name was given that would be used throughout his or her lifetime. People were also referred to by nicknames, particularly in the case of long names, and sometimes with the addition of the name of the father, and, less frequently, the name of the mother, since there were often a limited number of popular names at any one period. When children and their parents shared the same name, one could be called “the older” and the other “the younger.”

Like Native American names, Egyptian personal names usually encoded meaning. Many represented a characteristic, like *wsr* (“powerful”) or *nfr* (“beautiful”). Names could also invoke devotion to a particular god, such as Ankhfenmut (“Mut is his life”) or Isinofret (“the beautiful Isis”). Names could even commemorate specific events, as in Horemheb (“Horus in festival”) and Amenemopet (“Amun is at the Opet festival”). The names of kings were also popular, such as Sneferu, Pepi, or Amenhotep. They also could be compounded with wishes or signifiers for private names, such as “Pepi-ankh” or “Amenhotep son of Hapu.”

Some names were used by both men and women, for example, the wife of the nomarch Djheutyakht was also named Djheutyakht. The distinction was made sometimes by the use of a male or female figure as a determinative at the end of the name. Sometimes a distinction between the male and female versions is made by the addition of the feminine ending *.t* at the end of the name or the masculine article *pa* at the beginning.

Names could also refer to relatives. The words *sa* (“son”) and *sat* (“daughter”) could be combined with the name of the father, for example, as in Sakhmose (“daughter of Khmose”) or, in reference to a god, Sitamun (“daughter of Amun”).

In the case of hereditary names, when sons were often given the same name as their father and grandfathers, an extra name was added, designated as the *mi nfr* (“beautiful name”), and is usually designated as *ddw n f pnkbt* (“also called Pennekhbet”). Sometimes, as in, Iah-ms (“Ahmose”) *ddw n f pnkbt* (“also called Pennekhbet”). Sometimes, however, this designation is omitted and confusion results as to who exactly is being mentioned. The *ddw n f* phrase could also be employed when a foreigner needed a more Egyptian-styled name.

Nicknames and abbreviations for long names were also common, and it is sometimes difficult to be certain whether a person’s mentioned name was such a nickname or simply their regular name. Even kings could have nicknames, as in the example of Ramesses II (r. 1279–1213 BCE), who was also called Sisi.

The ancient Egyptians regarded names as part of a person’s identity. Having knowledge of a thing’s name meant having a certain power over it. This idea can be seen in the practice of execration texts, where the name of an enemy or even a dangerous animal or evil spirit was written on a pottery bowl or clay figurine, which then got smashed, symbolically killing “the evil.”

An Egyptian saying was “to speak the name of the dead is to make them live again.” Personal enemies or enemies of the state could have their names hacked away to be denied eternal life. During the periods following the reigns of Queen Hatshepsut (r. 1473–1458 BCE) and King Akhenaten (1353–1336 BCE), their names on the monuments they had erected were systematically erased or written over, a practice referred to as *damnatio memoriae*.

It was also a frequent occurrence for a king to “usurp” the statuary or reliefs of an earlier ruler by placing his own name on an object, even a statue with a likeness fashioned of someone else. Once the object was renamed, it was imbued with the identity of its new owner. While in some cases sculpture and relief was recarved to look more like the usurper, in many cases, the representation may not have been altered in any way, and just the addition of the new name was sufficient to repurpose the image.

In some cases, a person’s name could also be altered. As recorded in the harem conspiracy papyri, following the attempt to murder Ramesses III (r. 1184–1153 BCE), the court records describe the trial of those involved. Apart from the chief defendant, Tiy, one of Ramesses’s minor queens, most of the accused bear names that clearly were not their original names but pejorative appellations to underscore their nefarious deeds and their status as pariahs. Two of the defendants, for example, are called Mesedsure (“Ra hates him”) and Binemwese (“evil in Waset

[Thebes]”). This renaming underscores how closely a person’s name and identity were considered to be bound.

See also: *Family and Gender: Kinship and Genealogy*

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PETS

The ancient Egyptians were keen observers of nature and known as animal lovers. Some household pets, such as cats and dogs, are familiar today, but other more exotic animals were occasionally kept as pets in pharaonic Egypt. Recent research comparing the genomes of domestic cats with wild felines has given us new light into the process of the domestication of the cat. Cats appear to have been associated with human populations for at least 9,000 years. Their domestication may have coincided with the beginnings of agriculture, and early farmers most likely welcomed cats because they controlled rodents that consumed their grain harvests.

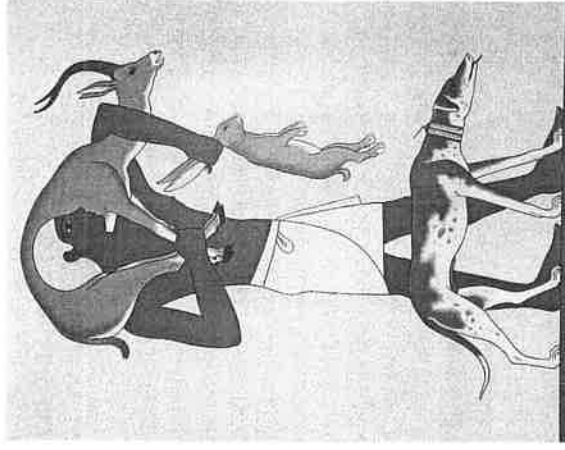
The genome that was sequenced of the domestic cat (*Felis silvestris catus*) resembles that of four wild cats belonging to two species, the European wildcat (*Felis silvestris silvestris*) and the Near Eastern wildcat (*Felis silvestris libyca*). It appears that the conversion from feral cats to domesticated cats involved changes in the genes for memory, fear conditioning, and stimulus-reward learning. These alterations in the genetic makeup of cats could also explain traits like being able to see in low light, increased auditory and visual acuity, and hyper-carnivorous diet. Many of these mutations are related to the evolution of tameness.

Recent studies on the DNA of ancient Egyptian mummified cats show a match to the contemporary domestic cat mitotypes found in modern Egypt and the Middle East. The divergence from the genotype of *Felis silvestris silvestris* estimates the date of the domestication of the mummies’ wild ancestor to be between 2,000 and 7,500 years earlier. Two wildcat subspecies found in Egypt are the *Felis silvestris libyca* and *Felis silvestris tristrami*. They are very similar to domestic cats, although their limbs are longer and they have proportionately longer tails.

Cats were called *miaw* in ancient Egyptian and revered as manifestations of the household goddess Bastet. They are depicted in domestic scenes as seated under chairs, perched in windows, and accompanying their masters on hunting trips. Prince Thutmose even had a miniature stone sarcophagus made for his pet cat.

While cats are most often associated with ancient Egypt, because of their frequent depictions in Egyptian art, dogs were also important, both as pets and also as symbols of gods and divine beings. Bones of domesticated dogs have been discovered in archaeological contexts in the Nile Valley dating to the early Predynastic Period (prior to about 3000 BCE). There are even representations of dogs wearing collars on a predynastic palette now in the Ashmolean Museum. There are many more domesticated dogs represented in tombs from the Old Kingdom (c. 2575–2150 BCE) onward. The ancient Egyptian word for dog was *iw*, which probably derived from the sound of a dog’s bark. Dogs were employed in hunting, as guard dogs, in military campaigns, and as household pets. The different breeds are sometimes difficult to distinguish from the representation, but there seem to have been types similar to modern basenjis, salukis, greyhounds, and mastiffs.

The domestication of the dog (*Canis lupus familiaris*) is far more ancient than the cat and probably than any other animal. The origin of the domestic dog has recently been studied using mitochondrial DNA, which suggests that wolves and dogs split into different species around 100,000 years ago. Whether this was due to human manipulation or not is a matter of speculation, but the partnership between humans and dogs stretches far back into the remote past. The exact origin and location of dog domestication is also unclear; it is thought to have been in east Asia but may well have been in Africa in the Sahara. Due to climate change, humans and their hunting dogs migrated to the Nile Valley. The ancestor of most domestic dogs is the gray wolf (*Canis lupus*), although it has been reported that modern genetic testing shows that basenjis are descended from the Ethiopian wolf (*Canis simensis*).



Dogs in ancient Egypt were often used for hunting. Here a man returns from a hunt carrying a gazelle and hare, presumably caught with the help of the greyhound beside him. (DeAgostini/Getty Images)

ETERNAL DOG HOUSE

The excavations of the Harvard University Museum of Fine Arts Expedition to Giza discovered many unique finds dated to the Old Kingdom, but among the most unusual was a *mastaba* tomb built for a dog. The tomb itself was not located, but a reference to it was made on a block that had come from the tomb of the dog's owner. An inscription on the block recorded that a dog, which was named Abuwtiyuw, was the guard dog of the king. He clearly must have been a favorite of his majesty and when the dog died the king decreed that Abuwtiyuw be buried in a tomb built by the gang of royal masons and that the dog be given a sarcophagus from the royal treasury, along with fine linen, incense, and perfumed ointment. The king is said to have done this so that the dog might be honored before the great god Anubis. Just like people, pets seem to have had a chance at eternal life, and the king wanted to ensure that his faithful guardian would be with him forever.

Dogs were also kept as pets as well as used for hunting. They had collars and leashes and had names like "Blacky" and "Spot." One dog favored by a king of the Old Kingdom was granted its own tomb at Giza. While some pets were buried with humans, many more animals were sacrificed to the gods and raised especially for that purpose rather than for household companions.

Besides dogs and cats, Egyptians kept other animals as pets, including monkeys, gazelles, and geese. Many animals were hunted for food and sport, such as waterfowl, rabbits, antelopes, and ostriches. Hippopotami, very dangerous creatures, were sometime the focus of a royal hunt, as were lions and cheetahs. Such hunts proved the king's prowess, and he is often equated with a "strong bull" or described as "raging like a panther." Wild animals were sometimes kept in menageries in royal palaces to highlight the king's prowess in mastering the natural world. A similar purpose was no doubt at play in the layout of wild animal graves around the burial of a predynastic king at Hierakonpolis that included a wild bull, elephant, and hartebeest.

See also: Food and Drink: Animal Husbandry; Hunting and Fowling

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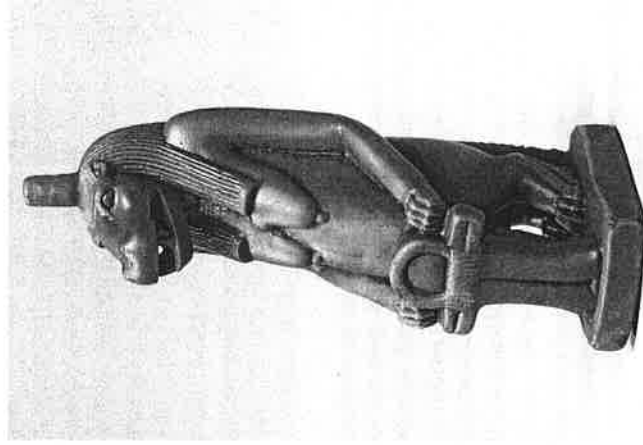
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PREGNANCY AND FERTILITY

For a largely agrarian population that depended on children to undertake chores and maintain the family farm, fertility was of prime importance in ancient Egypt. The "Instructions of Any" counsels: "Take a wife while you're young. That she make a son for you; She should bear for you while you're youthful. It is proper to make people. Happy the man whose people are many. He is saluted on account of his progeny" (Lichtheim, 1976, 136).

Young women were often depicted as symbols of fertility, and the ability to bear children was an important factor in marriage. One method to gauge a woman's ability to get pregnant required placing a clove of garlic or an onion in her vagina; if the smell was found on her breath the following morning, she was believed to be fertile. Another test to determine if a woman could conceive involved smearing oil on her breasts



Amulet of Taweret, faience, Ptolemaic Period, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York, USA (26.7.1193). The goddess Taweret was a protector of women in childbirth. She is portrayed as a composite figure of a hippopotamus, lion, and crocodile. The fearsome qualities of these component parts warned off any evil threatening mother and baby. (Image copyright © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image source: Art Resource, NY)

THE GODDESS TAWERET

One of the most important deities evoked in the home to protect the expecting and nursing mother and child was the goddess Taweret or Thueris. Her frightening image was a grotesque combination of the head of a hippopotamus, the tail of a crocodile, and the claws of a lion. She also is often shown with large pendulous breasts. Egyptian art frequently depicts hippopotami in fierce defense of their young from crocodiles and other dangers as well as being attentive mothers. Taweret could use all of these attributes to protect pregnant women, particularly during childbirth. She sometimes wears the sun disk and cow-horned crown of a goddess and frequently is shown holding the *tyet* sign, a symbol associated with Isis. Images of the goddess are often depicted on household furniture, on jewelry, and as amulets intended to protect women.

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and shoulders before bedtime. If in the morning her blood vessels appeared to be normal and carrying blood, she was thought likely to bear children. Inserting a date into the vagina was thought to cure sterility. Another remedy for sterility involved rubbing the belly and thighs with menstrual blood. Romaine lettuce, which was sacred to the god Min, was considered a cure for sterility, in all probability because its milky white juice resembled semen.

The medical papyri and the records from the workmen's village at Kahun contain many spells for fertility, pregnancy, and determining the sex of an unborn child. One such test involved emmer and barley, which the woman was supposed to moisten with her urine every day; if they grew, she would bear a child. If only the barley grew, it would be a male; if the emmer alone grew, it would be a female; if neither grew, she would be barren. Strange as it may seem, when it was replicated in a modern experiment, the test was actually accurate in 70 percent of all cases. The seeds may have germinated due to the elevated levels of estrogen, which stimulates growth; the sprouting, however, did not seem to be gender specific.

Just as there were ways of determining if a woman was fertile, there were methods that were believed to prevent pregnancy. Recipes for contraceptives included

making a mixture of acacia, carob, and dates, which were ground with honey and placed in the vagina. Another method was to mix milk and natron or to plug the orifice with crocodile dung. Some of these ingredients have actually been proven to be effective spermicides. Since most women breastfed, that process would add to the time when women would be less likely to conceive. Overpopulation, however, was not a problem in ancient Egypt. Infant mortality is estimated to have been around 30 percent, and between years one and five there were another 20 percent that did not survive. Given these dangers, many amulets, spells, and rituals were employed to try and protect the mother and child. In particular, household gods like Bes, who was actually a composite of a number of dwarf deities, had a leonine visage, sword, and amuletic symbols that could ward off evil. Thueris, a composite of a pregnant hippopotamus, crocodile, and lion, was similarly armed against misfortune. The goddess Heqet was associated with fertility and childbirth. Isis, as a supreme mother goddess, was widely venerated throughout the ancient world, and the goddess Hathor was also invoked to safeguard the infant and its mother, and the seven cow deities associated with her oversaw the destiny of the newborn.

See also: Family and Gender: Childbirth; Infancy and Childhood; Sexuality

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SEXUALITY

While there is little in the way of the explicit sexuality of Greco-Roman art in Egyptian art and literature, ancient Egyptian attitudes toward sexuality seem to have been more liberal than in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Sex was thought of as an essential element of everyday life, and even the gods themselves were thought to engage in sexual relations as an act of creation. In art, there are fairly straightforward depictions of nudity and sexual congress. However, the act of intercourse itself is usually represented in a highly stylized way, particularly in mythological or temple scenes, such as Isis in the form of a kite straddling Osiris to illustrate the impregnation that led to the birth of Horus, or the demure scene of the gods Amun and Ahmes seated on a couch prior to their conceiving Hatshepsut (r. 1473–1458 BCE) as depicted in her birth reliefs at the temple of Deir el-Bahri. It has been

suggested that a similar scene in the tomb of the powerful Sixth Dynasty (2323–2150 BCE) official Mereruka at Saqqara, where he sits with his wife on a bed, is a similarly coded representation.

On the other hand, there are graphic depictions of sex most famously in the Turin Erotic Papyrus. The polychrome painted papyrus dates to the Ramesside era (13th–12th centuries BCE) and graphically illustrates a number of sexual positions being engaged in both indoors and outside. The men are depicted on the papyrus as unattractive, balding, short, and paunchy with exaggeratedly large genitalia, while the women are tall, young, and beautiful. At one end of the papyrus, a woman lies on a bed and reaches toward a man and woman engaged in intercourse on the floor below her. Other scenes are more acrobatic in nature, including even an encounter on a chariot. In another scene, a man tries to stimulate a woman, while she, in contrast to his exuberance, seemingly ignores him to apply her cosmetics. In the background are jars full of wine or beer, suggesting that it may be representing a party or even an orgy. Other interpretations are that it depicts a single man's encounters. The comments inscribed on the margins of the papyrus include: "come behind me with your love" and "it is agreeable work." The papyrus must have had a satirical purpose, for it also has a section of animals performing humorous tasks.

Numerous erotic small sculptures and terracotta images were produced during the Greco-Roman Period (after about 300 BCE), often showing exaggeratedly large sex organs and multiple penetrations. Egyptian mythology featured sordid tales of sex, adultery, incest, and even necrophilia. The god Amun Re began creation by masturbation, which produced his children, Shu and Tefnut, and their incestuous union brought forth Nut and Geb. The offspring of these siblings, Isis, Nephthys, Osiri, and Set, all had brother-sister relations. Seth killed his brother Osiris, but Isis was able to conceive a child with him even after death. Their son Horus engaged in an epic battle with Seth to avenge his father's murder, but another tale has Seth raping his nephew in an attempt to humiliate him. While there seem to have been no proscriptions against premarital intercourse, after marriage adultery was considered an offense. In the "The Tale of the Two Brothers," the adulterous wife was found out and murdered, and her body was thrown to the dogs. Homosexual relations were not forbidden, but there is little evidence for them and, as in the tale of Horus and Seth or of Pepi and General Sasetet, it seems to have been considered somewhat shameful.

It appears that some religious festivals may have included orgiastic celebrations. Many foods were considered aphrodisiacs, such as lettuce, which was associated with the fertility god, Min, who was depicted with an erect penis. Onions, fennel, ginger, pomegranates, coriander, and radishes mixed together were also thought to have aphrodisiac properties.

THE TOMB OF THE TWO BROTHERS

One of the most unusual and discussed tombs found in Egypt is the *mastaba* of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep, which dates to the mid-Fifth Dynasty (2465–2323 BCE); it was later buried by the causeway of the pyramid of King Unis (r. 2353–2323 BCE) at Saqqara. Being buried so soon after its construction preserved much of the painted detail of the tomb, and it is considered one of the most beautiful tombs in the entire necropolis as well as one of the largest.

The tomb is unique in having been built for two men; Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep, who shared the same titles, which included "Prophet of Ra in the Sun Temple of Niusserre" and "Heads of the Manicurists of the Great House." Even more remarkable are the many scenes that show the men together in intimate embrace. Although some have suggested that they were brothers and possibly twins (one scholar even suggested they were conjoined twins!), the men, in fact, had different parents. There has been much speculation as to their relationship and that they may have been homosexual companions, although there are also depictions of their wives and children within the tomb.

See also: Family and Gender: Incest; "The Tale of the Two Brothers"; Wives and Husbands; Primary Documents: Family and Gender/The Tale of the Two Brothers; Family and Gender/Love Songs; Family and Gender/A Forbidden Encounter: The Tale of General Sasetet and King Pepi II

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SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Ancient Egypt had a hierarchical social system with the pharaoh at the top and the vast majority of the populace, who were tenant farmers, at the bottom. This system is often likened to a pyramid, but what made Egypt so stable and so successful for

many years was that the king's control of the country was three pronged, through the civil administration, the military, and the temples.

Immediately under the pharaoh, one or more viziers, who could be royal sons, generals, or highly competent men, managed the civil bureaucracy. All other officials reported to the vizier. The judiciary was also part of the civil administration, so that the vizier could sit on the High Court. While the king could intervene in any of these matters, the judgment was usually left to the vizier.

Under the vizier were the nomarchs, who ruled over the nomes, county-like districts, which reflected natural geographic features as well as the predynastic proto-states. While the king could appoint the nomarch, the post could also be hereditary, and in periods when central government was weak, the nomarchs often expanded their own power base and even waged war against neighboring nomes to capture more territory.

Reporting to the nomarch were the tax collectors and individual town and village mayors. Tax collectors remeasured the fields after each flood season and made assessments on the basis of land area and the projected crop yield. Depending on the size of the community they oversaw, some mayors, such as those of Thebes, could be very wealthy and powerful.

The local councils (*kenbet*) not only judged legal cases but also could carry out administrative duties. A "great *kenbet*" ruled on judgments made by the lower court. People could also go to the temple and ask the god for an oracular decision in disputes.

The upper classes in Egypt could hold large tracts of land, which were then rented out to tenant farmers, much like the serfs of mediaeval Europe. The tenants paid most of the harvest in rent and some of it in taxes, so they were usually left little to live on. Grain was the main form of currency in the economy.

Craftsmen and artisans could be considered part of a "middle class," with some living much better than others. The villagers at Deir el-Medina had comfortable, if cramped, quarters, while the sculptor Thutmose at Tell el-Amarna had a lavish villa. Those men working on royal or state commissions could also offer their services as barter for goods and other services.

Contrary to popular belief, slaves were not all that common in ancient Egypt, and the system of slavery was more like indentured servitude than the slavery that is familiar from the antebellum American South. Slaves could sell themselves into or out of slavery, had some legal rights, and could marry nonslaves. Slavery could be a judicial punishment, but most slaves were prisoners of war who had been granted as tokens to soldiers or the temples.

Unlike most other ancient societies, women in ancient Egypt were considered nearly equal to men. They could walk about freely, own property, and trade, and they had legal rights and independence. They could also carry out business deals, make contracts, and own property. As a mark of status, well-born women could

HATSHEPSUT (r. 1473–1458 BCE)

Queen Hatshepsut, who ruled over Egypt as regent and pharaoh for more than 20 years, affected a unique change in gender identity. The only child of Thutmose I (r. 1504–1492 BCE) by his principal wife, Queen Ahmose, Hatshepsut married her stepbrother Thutmose II (r. 1492–1479) after the death of her father. When Thutmose II died, Hatshepsut became regent for the child Thutmose III (r. 1479–1425 BCE), the late pharaoh's son by a minor wife. Seven years later, Hatshepsut took the unprecedented step of assuming the title and full powers of a pharaoh herself, becoming coruler of Egypt with her stepson.

Her motivations remain unclear. Some believe that her thirst for power drove her, while others postulate a political crisis, such as a threat from another branch of the royal family, led her to act to save the throne for her stepson. Whatever her reasons, she began having herself depicted as a male, going bare-chested and wearing the traditional king's kilt and crown, along with the false beard. She even was referred to in inscriptions with male pronouns.

Hatshepsut was a highly successful ruler, and the country prospered. She sent out trading expeditions to the land of Punt and built and renewed monuments throughout Egypt and Nubia. Her grandest achievements were her mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahri, known as Djoser-djeseru, the "holiest of holy places," and the erection of a pair of red granite obelisks in the temple of Amun at Karnak.

After her death, Thutmose III assumed sole power. Late in his reign, he began a campaign to eradicate Hatshepsut's memory by destroying or defacing her images and erasing her name in inscriptions, often replacing it with his own. This may have been revenge on his domineering stepmother, although some scholars theorize that it was an attempt to emphasize his own line of succession and prevent challenges to his heirs.

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Metropolitan Museum of Art. "Seated Statue of Hatshepsut." New Kingdom, ca. 1479–1458 BCE. <http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/544450>. Accessed June 10, 2016.

serve as singers, dancers, or musicians in the temple. Poor women could work as servants in households or work in the fields alongside the farmers. Women could also be taken as concubines but would not have the same status as the wife. Most marriages were probably arranged, and women were expected to bring a dowry; however, if divorce followed, the wife could take all her possessions back to her

family. Egyptians could also marry people of other nationalities or ethnicities. For most of dynastic history, Egypt was a melting pot where people of various backgrounds and races lived in harmony.

While ancient Egyptian society was highly stratified, there was room for social mobility. People with skills, particularly the ability to read and write, could move far up the social ladder. Indeed, the ideal was to be a self-made man, and such a claim was often made in tomb biographies, only to be disproved by a look at genealogy. Most of our textual and pictorial data is only for the wealthier classes, so we must depend on archaeology for an understanding of the rest of Egyptian society.

See also: Family and Gender: Family Structure; Primary Documents: Family and Gender/Fatherly Advice in the Papyrus Insinger

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"THE TALE OF THE TWO BROTHERS"

One of the most famous stories from ancient Egypt, "The Tale of the Two Brothers" was also one of the earliest works of literature to be discovered. It was first noted in 1852 by the Egyptologist Emmanuel de Rouge in a papyrus in the collection of Elizabeth d'Orbiney, who subsequently sold it to the British Museum. The papyrus, which is the only known copy of the story, was remarkably well preserved and dated to the reign of Seti II (c. 1200–1194 BCE). It has been suggested that, like many works of Egyptian literature, it was a political allegory because the time of its writing coincided with a dynastic conflict between Seti and his rival for the throne and probable brother, Amenmesse (c. 1203–1200 BCE).

The text is written in an elegant hand and is one of the few papyri signed and dedicated by the scribe who wrote it. The text finishes with the inscription: "It has come to a good end under the scribe of the treasury Kagab, and the scribes of the treasury, Hori, and Meremopet. Written by the scribe Ennana, the owner of this book. Whoever maligns this book, Thoth will contend with him" (Lichtheim, 1976, 210).

Several themes run through the text. On the one hand, the story could be seen as a simple morality play; on the other hand, it has been suggested that the tale concerns the ideas of kingship and the connection between the gods and the pharaoh. The story centers on two brothers—Anpu, or "Anubis," the oldest, who is married

and cares for his younger brother Bata. They work together on the family farm. One day, Anpu's wife attempts to seduce Bata, but he rejects her. The spurned wife then tells her husband that his brother attempted to seduce her. In a rage, Anpu tries to murder Bata, who manages to escape and prays to Re to save him. The god puts a crocodile-infested lake between the two brothers. Bata is then able to tell his side of the story to his brother. In a gesture of self-mutilation to prove his sincerity, Bata cuts off his genitalia and throws them into the water, where they are eaten by catfish, a reference to the myth of Osiris and the conflict with his brother Seth.

Bata says he is going to the Valley of the Cedars, where he will place his heart on the top of the blossom of a cedar tree, and, if he finds it, and that tree is cut down, Bata will die, but Anpu will enable Bata to live again. Bata tells Anpu that if he is ever given a jar of beer that froths, he should know to seek out his brother. After hearing his brother's version of the events, Anpu returns home and kills his wife. Meanwhile, Bata is establishing a life in the Valley of the Cedar, building a new home for himself. Bata comes upon the gods and, in particular, Khnum, the creator of humanity, who makes a wife for Bata. Because of her magical creation, the pharaoh wishes to make her his wife. So she can be free, she tells him to cut down the tree in which Bata has put his heart. When this is done, Bata dies.

At this point, Anpu receives a frothy jar of beer and begins a quest for his brother's heart. After a four-year search, he discovers the heart. He follows the instructions given to him and Bata is resurrected. Bata then turns into a bull and goes to see his wife and the pharaoh. His wife, who knows who he is, asks the pharaoh if she may dine on the bull's liver. When the bull is butchered, two drops of Bata's blood fall to the ground and two sacred Persea trees spring up. Bata, now transformed into a tree, speaks to his former wife. Fearing him, she orders the Persea trees to be cut down and the wood used to make furniture. But while this is happening, a splinter flies off and winds up in the wife's mouth, impregnating her. She then gives birth to a son, who becomes the crown prince. When the pharaoh dies, the crown prince, who is actually the reincarnated Bata, becomes pharaoh. He then appoints his elder brother Anpu as crown prince. The story ends with the brothers reunited and ruling Egypt.

See also: Arts: Writing and Literature: Family and Gender: "The Tale of the Two Brothers"; Primary Documents: Family and Gender/The Tale of the Two Brothers

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WIVES AND HUSBANDS

As soon as a young man reached midadolescence, it was time for him to start his own family. Women were believed to be suitable for brides after their first menses. The average age of men when they first married was around 16 to 20 years, though some males were much older. Most marriages in ancient Egypt were probably arranged and occurred within small communities of families that were closely linked. Census records from the Roman Period (after about 30 BCE) record that a large percentage of individuals wed first cousins or step- or even full siblings. Some of the wisdom literature from the Late Period (664–343 BCE) gives advice to parents on selecting a husband for their daughter. Despite the prevalence of arranged marriages, the love poetry that survives clearly indicates a notion of romantic attraction. One example reads, “Your hand is in my hand, my body trembles with joy, my heart is exalted because we walk together,” and “She is more beautiful than any other girl, she is like a star rising . . . with beautiful eyes for looking and sweet lips for kissing” (Lichtheim, 1980, 128).

Prenuptial agreements could be drawn up by the bride’s father and potential son-in-law to protect the bride should the union fail. Virginity does not seem to have been a necessity for marriage, and premarital sex was socially acceptable. However, once a couple married, they were expected to be faithful to each other. In small, watchful communities, it would be difficult to keep such illicit liaisons secret, and one papyrus records the anger of the populace at an adulterer:

As follows: Your people, their elders and children, men and women, have gone in the evening and they have come, saying: “We have come in order to beat them up together with their people.”

It was the steward of the house who said to them: “O! What is this then about . . .” [and they] answered him with these words: “[It is] eight months to this day that he has sexual intercourse with this woman, although he is not [her] husband . . .” (Janssen, 1988, 134–137)

Not every marriage was arranged by the family, and partners were not always drawn from relatives or the local pool of neighbors, for even marriages between Egyptians and foreigners occurred. While kings could have multiple wives, including foreign princesses sent to cement diplomatic ties, it was not common, although not unheard of, for nonroyal men to have more than one wife. These women would have been more like concubines or mistresses and would not have had the same status as the wife, as the Hekanakhte Letters indicate. The word used for “concubine” was *hbswt*, as opposed to the word for “wife,” which was *hmt*. The term for “husband” was *hi*. The principle queen was known as the “great royal wife” (*hmt nswt*

wrt). In large private houses, just as in the royal palaces, there were quarters devoted purely to the women. This would include wives, daughters, other female relations, and concubines. The ancient Egyptian term for these quarters was *ipet* or *per-khemret*, (“private rooms” or “harem”). These were often suites of rooms set in the inner part of the house beside the master’s bedroom. For royalty, they could be entire separate palace communities, like at Gurob. Such segregated living quarters existed in the Middle East until relatively recent times.

Husbands and wives were often depicted together in intimate embrace in sculpture and tomb paintings and reliefs, which would not only commemorate their union but ensure its survival through all eternity. Wives were most often buried in the tombs of their husbands, and letters to the dead found in tomb chapels from one spouse to another show that the connection between the two individuals could even transcend death.

See also: Family and Gender: Divorce and Remarriage; Marriage; Sexuality; Primary Documents: Economics and Work/The Hekanakhte Letters; Family and Gender/Household Hints: The Instruction of Any from Papyrus Boulaq 4

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Pair statue of Userhat and Kha, granite, Kamak Cachette, New Kingdom, late 18th–early 19th Dynasty. Husbands and wives are often depicted together in tomb paintings and sculpture to ensure their eternal bond. Here, Userhat is shown tenderly wrapping his arm around his wife, Kha. (Los Angeles County Museum of Art [47.8.34])

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FASHION AND APPEARANCE



INTRODUCTION

The appearance of the ancient Egyptians is familiar to us through their many representations. Egyptian clothing and costume seemed to change little over time, but some of this may reflect a conservatism in artistic tradition rather than the actual circumstances of everyday life in ancient Egypt. In general, people are shown wearing light clothing, though clearly there would have been a need for woollen cloaks in the wintertime. In general, however, the favored material for dress was linen. The cloth was produced in great quantities and in a wide range of thread counts from very coarse to very fine. Linen is not dyed easily, so the Egyptians relied on jewelry and ornamentation to offset their stark white garments.

Jewelry and ornaments were worn for more than decoration; they were signifiers of social standing and cultural affiliation, and for protection. Dress could also indicate one's origin or employment. Kings wore many different items of regalia depending on the duties that they were performing at the moment, be they political, religious, or military.

The Egyptians were fastidious and bathed frequently and often shaved their body hair. Priests, in particular, were supposed to be ritually pure. Cosmetics and perfumes were also employed to improve one's appearance, not just for this life but for all eternity.

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