

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/376199465>

# An Essay On "The Egyptian civilization highlighting their Religion and Society" History of World Civilizations Introduction

Article · December 2023

CITATIONS

0

READS

201

1 author:



[Mubashshiruzzaman Hasan](#)

University of Dhaka

4 PUBLICATIONS 0 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE



An  
Essay  
On  
**"The Egyptian civilization highlighting their  
Religion and Society"**

History of World Civilizations

Mubashshiruzzaman Hasan

Section: A

Roll No: 47

Session: 2019-20

Department: Islamic History and Culture.

## **Introduction:**

Egyptian civilization was one of the most ancient civilizations. Besides, Egypt was appeared as the most primitive centre of civilization in the second part of the nineteenth century. But Chester G. Starr and some other archaeologists argued. They referred Mesopotamia as the infancy of civilization. Moreover, after discovering of Indus civilization in 1924, some scholars inferred to that Mohenjo-Daro is the oldest civilization yet discovered. Although there are many controversies, Egypt was so much important place for starting of civilization. Egyptians' social life was highly stratified and they were spare religious.

## **The rise of Egyptian civilization:**

When any culture arrives at the highest stage of development, then it's called civilization. Culture encompasses food, religion and social life; what a particular group of people wear, what they believe is right or wrong, how they greet visitors, how they behave with loved ones and a million ones. (Cristina De Rossi, an anthropologist at Barnet and Southgate College in London) In fact, the Egyptians had to pass a long way to create their civilization. The Egyptian civilization was launched along the Nile. Historian Herodotus said about Egypt before 400 B.C., " It is acquired country and it is the grant of the Nile." At first, the Nile was originated from Abyssina's hill. Then, it was integrated in Nubia (Modern Sudan). But, some hills interrupted its channel. In those interrupted places, six cataracts were made. The Nile overcame its all obstacles and fell into the Mediterranean. People started to live around the cataracts and along the Nile. Thus, there was created a great ancient civilization named Egyptian civilization.

## **Duration of the ancient Egyptian civilization:**

The life span of ancient Egypt extended from about 5000 B.C. to 525 B.C. (Civilization past and present, p- 56) In 5000 B.C. The Egyptians were divided into two groups named the north Egyptians and the south Egyptians. The two parts of Egypt were accumulated in 4300 B.C. But, this accumulation wasn't stable. Egyptian leader 'Menes' further unified the Egypt in 3400 B.C. and entitled himself as a pharaoh. When the land was ruled by one pharaoh, then the Dynastic period started in Egypt. The Egyptian history before 3400 B.C. is called Pre-Dynastic period. The Dynastic period contained three kingdoms and two interludes. The kingdoms were the Old Kingdom, the Middle kingdom and the new kingdom. The Egyptians' social and religious life were different in different ages.

## **The Pre-Dynastic period:**

Egyptian history before 3400 B.C. is called the Pre-Dynastic period. As a result, artifacts that had been discovered in Egyptian tombs and went back as far as before 3400 B.C. were the symbols of the Pre-Dynastic age. These remains showed that the early Egyptians passed through the main divisions of the Old and New Stone Ages and had even begun to use copper for tools before the time of the Old Kingdom.

## **The Old Kingdom:**

The time 'from 3400 B.C. to 2475 B.C.' is called the age of the Old Kingdom. During the period of the old kingdom, the age of metals was definitely inaugurated. Important advances were made in industry. Papyrus-making was begun. The Fourth Dynasty was the most powerful and prosperous of the six dynasties of the Old Kingdom. But during the Sixth Dynasty, independent and ambitious provincial governors arose in Egypt. Then a destruction situation created in Egypt. This situation was remained from 2475 B.C. to 2160 B.C. This time is known as the Feudal Age and the transitional period from the Old Kingdom to the Middle Kingdom.

## **The Middle Kingdom:**

The Middle Kingdom started in 2160 B.C. and ended in 1780 B.C. The princes of Thebes succeeded in reestablishing national integrity after three hundred years of discords. This period is especially noted for its literature. But an Asiatic people called Hyksos thoroughly conquered the region of the delta and gradually extended their power over most Upper Egypt in about 1780 B.C. They were very powerful and ruled Egypt till 1580 B.C.

## **The New Kingdom:**

The period 'from 1580 B.C. to 525 B.C.' gained fame as the New Kingdom. The princes of the south achieved a complete victory against foreign Hyksos. Aahmes of Thebes was the great national hero who gained independence for his people and his reign was marked as the beginning of the third and the last magnificent period in Egyptian history. After the new dynasty, Egypt gradually fell into the hands of foreign powers.

## **The social life of the Egyptians**

### **Social classification of people:**

According to a survey, about seven million people were living in Egypt during the dynastic age. But most of them were semi-slaves. Before pre-dynastic age, all Egyptians were the member of same social and economic class. But, during the passing of pre-dynastic age, a great change had taken place in the social grouping of people. The Egyptians got divided into three main social classes.

1. The aristocratic community.
2. The middle class.
3. The lower class.

### **The aristocratic community:**

The pharaoh, court nobility, priests, corps and the owners of land were the members of aristocratic community. Pharaoh was the most powerful in society. All important administrative and military sectors were under the domination of pharaoh. Pharaoh and his family lived very advanced life. After pharaoh, the priests were comparatively more influential in society. They lived in temple and managed all religious actions. They had many servants. The military community arose in the middle kingdom. They also led a flourished life. The owners of land were rich farmers. They had many slaves. They also led royal life.

### **The middle class:**

The middle class composed of merchants and craftsmen. The middle class people was the backbone of the Egyptian society. Because they had strong role in economic development. Moreover their life style was very developed.

### **The lower class:**

The poor farmers and the slaves were the lower class people in the society. They lived in squalid villages made up of little mud and thatch houses. The slaves were condemned by all class of people. They were compelled to hard work. But they didn't find enough food to live. So, they led a very rueful life.

### **Family:**

The Egyptian society was established on the basis of family. Most men had only one wife. It was their unwritten law. But the richest nobles enjoyed the luxury of a harem. Pharaoh never married out of their family. In Egyptian society, divorce was infrequent. So, their family life was better.

### **The status of women:**

Women had special dignity in the society. They enjoyed equal respect of men. Besides, many aspects of society were dominated by women. Sons inherited property through their mother. In a word, the Egyptian society was ideal for respecting women.

## **The religious life of the Egyptian**

### **Influence of the religion:**

Egyptians were the most religious of all men. But their religious faith was not same in all ages. Their religious beliefs changed over time. The religion had a deep influence in all sectors with literature, arts, philosophy and science.

### **Polytheists:**

From pre-dynastic period the Egyptian religious system was polytheists. They worshipped various natural power and many animals to free from horror and to get favor. At first the sun-god Ra was the most important deity. During the old kingdom, the core of faith was the adoration of Ra. After transferring the capital, Thebes became an important political place. God Amun was very much powerful in Thebes. At one stage, Amun-Ra (Sun-god Ra + Amun) became the supreme god in Egypt.

### **Faith about Pharaoh:**

Pharaoh was the representative of the heroic Sun-god. Pharaoh spread his supremacy and controlled administration as a delegate of Ra. For this reason, Egyptians used to say the pharaoh the best god. Egyptians had a strong belief that as long as the king's body was kept intact, the empire would remain intact. To keep the king's body intact, they used to make mummy. Moreover, all people could claim full funeral rites as a symbol of religious equality in the middle kingdom.

### **The myth of Osiris:**

Osiris was the god of the Nile. His death and resurrection were celebrated each year. Then, an interesting myth developed. Osiris was murdered by Seth and resurrected by Isis. The legend of Osiris created a great impact in the religious life of the Egyptians. Gradually Osiris gained popularity and became the chief deity in Egypt.

### **Mummifying of body:**

The Egyptians saw in the myth a way to escape death. Osiris was the first mummy. He achieved immortality by the recovery of the many parts of his body. Therefore, every dead Egyptian was regarded as a second Osiris. The way to give him immortality was to preserve the corpse. This was achieved by mummifying and placing the body in a tomb which would give it the maximum of protection. If the soul came to Osiris cleansed of sin, it would be permitted to live forever in the Happy Field of Food. If the ordeal was not passed, a horrible creature devoured the rejected heart.

### **Faith about priests:**

During the new kingdom, prejudice and witchcraft gained wideness in the religion. Besides, Priests started to create various fictional fear in people's mind to gain benefit. The Egyptians believed that the priests used to meet gods and convey the prayers of people to them. Egyptians used to bestow them many things to get the priests' proximity. Thus they had become the owners of a lot of wealth and established state within state. They also used to sell a book known as the Book of the Dead guaranteeing a happy immortality after death. In this way religion became puppet in the hands of the priests.

### **Monotheist religion:**

In this situation, religion needed to be reformed. A famous pharaoh and reformer, Amenhotep IV, tried to establish a religion based on one deity, a sun-god called Aton. He also prohibited all gods without Aton. He himself adopted the title of Ikhnaton. But after the death of Ikhnaton, his efforts tragically failed. Ancient Egypt retained its polytheism to the end. Again the selfish priests started their business based on religion. Thus the Egyptian religion came to the ultimate line of decay. Gradually Egyptian civilization was destroyed for the decline of religion.

### **Conclusion:**

Egyptian civilization progressed on the basis of a systematic social and religious structure. On the other hand, Egyptian civilization also declined for the deterioration of society and religion. However, many customs of Egyptian civilization are still familiar in many countries. Above all, explicit statement of essential ethics and moralities of human beings consisted in the Egyptian religion and society. Finally J.E. Swain exactly said, "Writing, science, architecture and religion were all started on the road of progress by the ancient Egyptians, who passed, on the successive civilizations, a priceless heritage."

End