



This is a statue of Imhotep, who was an early and powerful vizier in ancient Egypt. Imhotep was famous for his role in designing and building great monuments.

9.3 Government Officials

Government officials belonged to the highest class on Egypt's social pyramid, after the pharaoh. Their job was to assist the pharaoh in his or her role as supreme ruler of Egypt.

Government officials were often members of the pharaoh's family or other upper-class families. Most of them inherited their positions from family members. However, trusted servants from the royal court sometimes rose to power.

Important Government Officials Three important officials were the vizier (vuh-ZEER), the chief treasurer, and the general of the armies. Each had his own duties.

The vizier had more power than anyone except the pharaoh. The vizier advised the pharaoh and carried out his commands. He appointed and supervised many of the other government officials.

The vizier also served as a kind of chief judge. Other judges would bring him their toughest cases. A vizier was expected to be fair and **neutral**, showing no special favor to either side in a dispute. One vizier gave this advice about being impartial, or not taking

sides: "Regard one you know like one you don't know, one near you like one far from you." In works of art, viziers were often shown wearing white, the color of neutrality.

The chief treasurer oversaw the government's wealth. His main duty was to collect taxes. Egypt's economy was based on goods rather than money. People paid their taxes in grain, cows, cloth, and silver.

After the pharaoh, the top military commander in Egypt was the general of the armies. He advised the pharaoh in matters of war and national security, such as how to protect Egypt's borders from invaders. He also helped the pharaoh make alliances with other kingdoms.

Lives of Luxury High government officials led lives of luxury. Most were nobles who had great wealth, fine homes, and plenty of time to socialize.

The lavish banquets enjoyed by these wealthy Egyptians illustrate their grand lifestyle. Hosts took pride in the meal. Cooks might roast duck, goose, pigeon, quail, antelope, sheep, and goat.

Dishes were piled high with special delicacies that might include figs, dates, grapes, and coconuts. A variety of breads and cakes and honey completed the feast.

Guests at banquets dressed in fine linen clothing. Both men and women wore perfume. Women often wore ropes of beads as jewelry. They painted their nails, lined their eyes with makeup, and used lipstick.

At the start of a banquet, it was customary for guests to offer the host lengthy blessings, such as wealth, great happiness, a long life, and good health. The host often responded simply with "Welcome, welcome," or "Bread and beer," as a way of saying, "Come and eat!"

The feast began with men and women taking their seats on opposite sides of the room. Important guests were given chairs with high backs. Everyone else sat on stools or cushions. Servants, mostly women, waited on the guests. There were no forks or spoons, so people ate with their fingers.

While the guests ate, musicians, dancers, and acrobats provided entertainment. Musicians were usually women. They played flutes, harps, rattles, and lutes (a guitarlike instrument). Guests often clapped along with the music.

These women of high social class enjoy a banquet.

