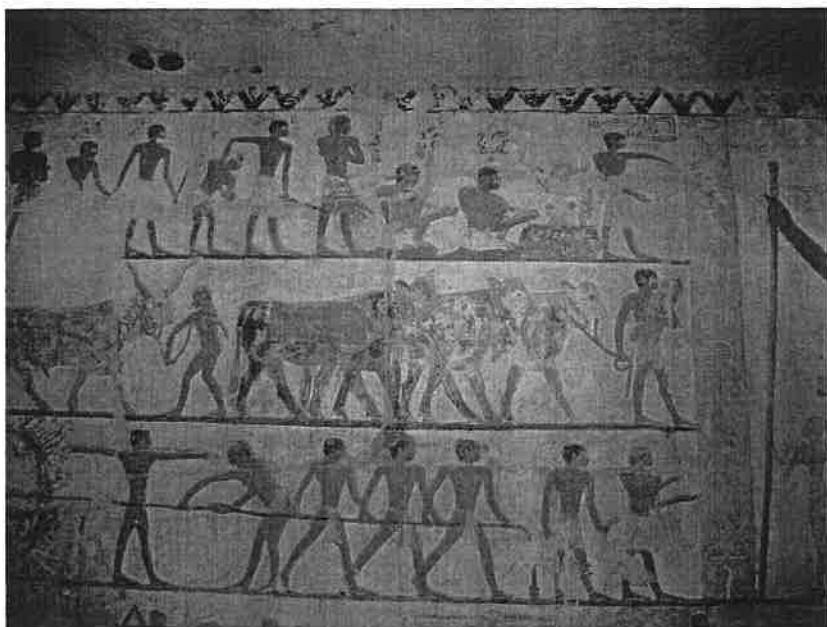
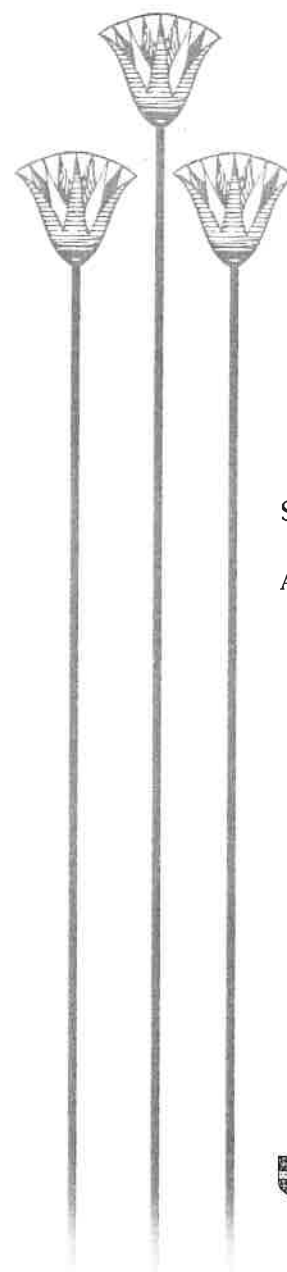




Agricultural and taxation scenes from the tomb of Nefer at Saqqara. Photo Salima Ikram.



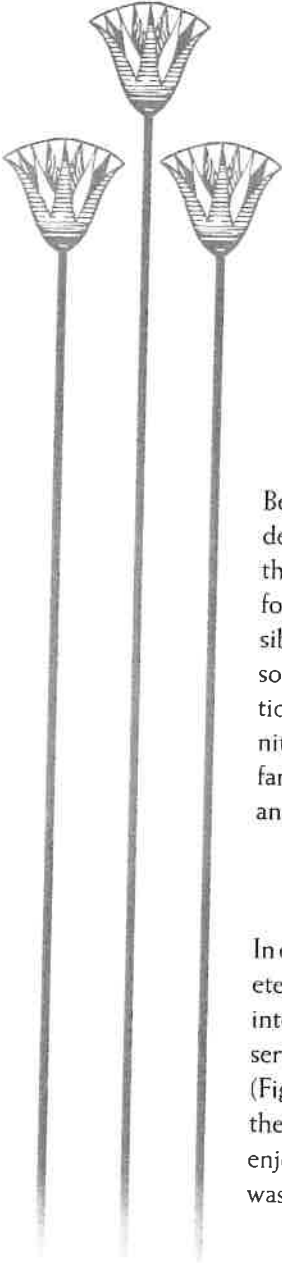
Ancient Egypt

An Introduction

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The Living and the Dead

Mummies, Tombs, and Mortuary Cults

Because the Egyptians believed that life continued after death (see Chapter 5), they mummified their bodies so that their souls (particularly the *ka*) would always have a form to animate and enjoy the Afterlife. Also, when possible, the Egyptians constructed their tombs from stone so that they could shelter the deceased forever. In addition to a burial place, Egyptian tombs, or 'houses for eternity', provided a physical location for the maintenance of family ties through the celebration of the mortuary cult, and a place where the dead and the living could interact.

Mummification

In order to be presented to Osiris for judgement, and to live eternally, the body of the deceased had to be transformed into a mummy. (Fig. 132.) A mummy is the artificially preserved body of a human being or an animal. (Fig. 133.) (Fig. 134.) Egyptians mummified their dead to preserve the body so that it could be reanimated by the soul and enjoy the delights of the Afterworld, which they believed was very similar to this world, except more pleasant.



Figure 132. This scene, from a papyrus in Berlin, shows the weighing of the heart against the feather of truth in the presence of Osiris and other gods. If the heart is heavier than the feather, the deceased is devoured by Ammit; if not, he can enter the Afterlife. Photo Nicholas Warner.



Figure 133. This mummy of a man was excavated in Theban Tomb 11/12 by a Spanish team directed by Jose Galan. Tomb robbers had plundered the tomb and left the mummy on top of a pile of rubble with its face exposed, perhaps as a warning to other thieves. The mummy might date to the 21st Dynasty. Photo Salima Ikram.

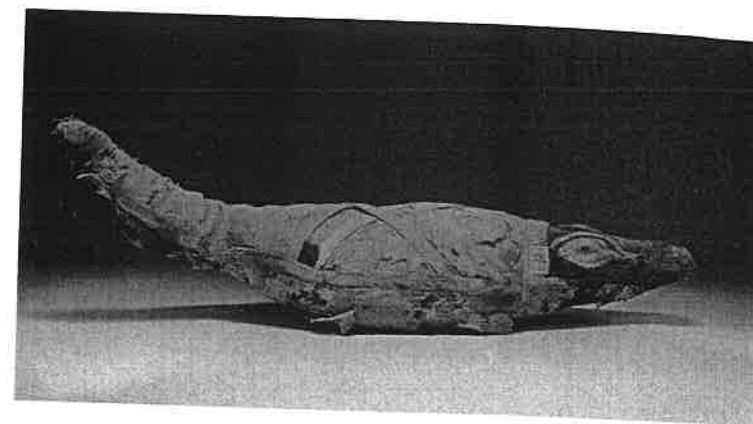


Figure 134. Egyptians mummified many kinds of animals. There were four main types of animal mummies: pets, sacred creatures, votive offerings, and food offerings. This crocodile, originally coming from Kom Ombo, was a votive offering to Sobek and was mummified simply, using natron and resins. Photo Anna-Marie Kellen.

The basis of mummification is preservation through dehydration using natron. Natron, a naturally deposited material found particularly in Wadi Natrun, located some 40 kilometres from Cairo, is basically a combination of salt and baking soda. Natron desiccates and inhibits bacterial activity. Removing the liquid from a body left the skin, hair, and sinew well preserved, and any ancient Egyptian who could afford even a basic method of mummification arranged for it. Those who were too poor to pay for this service were buried in the dry desert sand, which had a similar dehydrating effect as long as the body was not wrapped or placed in a coffin. The Egyptians believed that as long as the right spells were read and offerings made to the *ka*, the deceased could achieve an enjoyable Afterlife even without elaborate mummification.

Methods of mummification evolved over time, and often a variety of methods was used at a particular period, in different areas or by different embalming houses. The most 'classic' form of mummification was practised in the 18th Dynasty. The initial step was to remove from the body both its internal organs and its fluids in order to avoid decay. First the embalmers extracted the brain by inserting a sharp, pointed instrument into the left nostril, pushing through the ethmoid bone and poking into the cranium to break up the brain. The Egyptians favoured the left side, as this was where

The Destruction of Mummies

Many mummies have been destroyed over time for a variety of reasons: for their adornments, as souvenirs, for medicine (see box on the mummy trade in Chapter 2), and for other practical purposes. When people could not find sufficient firewood they would burn mummies as fuel. Mummies were allegedly used to make a paint marketed in Europe under the name 'Mummy Brown'. During the American Civil War, when cotton was scarce, mummy bandages were taken to Maine and turned into brown paper in which butchers would wrap joints of meat and other commodities. Animal mummies did not escape destruction either. In addition to being burned for fuel, cat mummies in particular were used as ballast for ships returning to Europe from Egypt. Once a ship was in port, the 'ballast' was either tossed overboard or crushed and sold to farmers as fertilizer.



Figure 135. Canopic jars, such as these in New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, were used to contain mummified viscera. Each head represents a specific deity responsible for a particular organ: human-headed Imseti, the liver; jackal-headed Duamutef, the stomach; hawk-headed Qebehsenuef, the intestines, and baboon-headed Hapy, the lungs. Prior to the Late Period, canopic jars had either plain lids or human-headed ones, although the association with these four gods, also known as the Four Sons of Horus, was already established in the Old Kingdom. Photo Salima Ikram.

the heart was located. Because they believed that the heart the seat of the soul and the essence of a person, they considered the left the important side. The embalmers then used a flexible tool to whip up the brain and liquefy it, finally teasing it out via the nostrils using an instrument with a hooked end. Once the brain had been extracted, molten resin was poured through the nostrils into the cranium, and the head was manipulated so that its interior was coated by the resin. The resin, which inhibited bacterial growth, served to disinfect and deodorize the head. The nostrils were plugged with small linen rolls to keep the resin in place.

The next step in the process was to remove the internal organs. A small cut was made in the lower left side of the abdomen. The lungs, liver, intestines, and stomach were removed through the incision and mummified separately, before being stored in vessels called canopic jars. The heart was never removed from the body as it was key to the resurrection of the deceased and had to be weighed against the feather of *maat* for a successful rebirth.

Each of the four internal organs was protected by a different demi-god, known collectively as the 'Four Sons of Horus'. Originally, these deities were shown with human heads, but from the New Kingdom on, the divinities were more personalised. Imseti was shown with the head of a man and was responsible for protecting the liver; he was associated with the goddess Isis. Hapy had the head of a baboon and was in charge of the lungs; he was associated with Nephthys. Duamutef was canid-headed and protected the stomach; he was associated with the goddess Neith. Qebehsenuef was hawk-headed

and cared for the intestines; he was associated with Selket. These protective demi-gods appeared on canopic jars, coffins, sarcophagi, and other funerary equipment. (Fig. 135.)

After evisceration, the body was washed out with cleansing palm wine, dried with linen towels, and filled with small linen bags containing natron. The whole body was immersed in powdered natron. The natron served to suck out the bodily fluids and had to be changed intermittently during the first few weeks of desiccation. Desiccation took forty days.

The second half of the mummification process took thirty days, during which time the body of the deceased was transformed into that of a semi-divine being. The embalmers dusted the natron from the body, wiped it with wine, and anointed it with seven sacred oils. The oils served not only a ritual purpose but also a practical one: they returned some flexibility to the body so that the limbs would not snap while it was being wrapped. Often the body was painted with resin, imparting a golden hue. The resin, which protected the body from bacteria, insects, and vermin, also referred to the Egyptian belief that the dead were transformed into divine beings, and that the flesh of the gods was made of gold, their bones of silver, and their

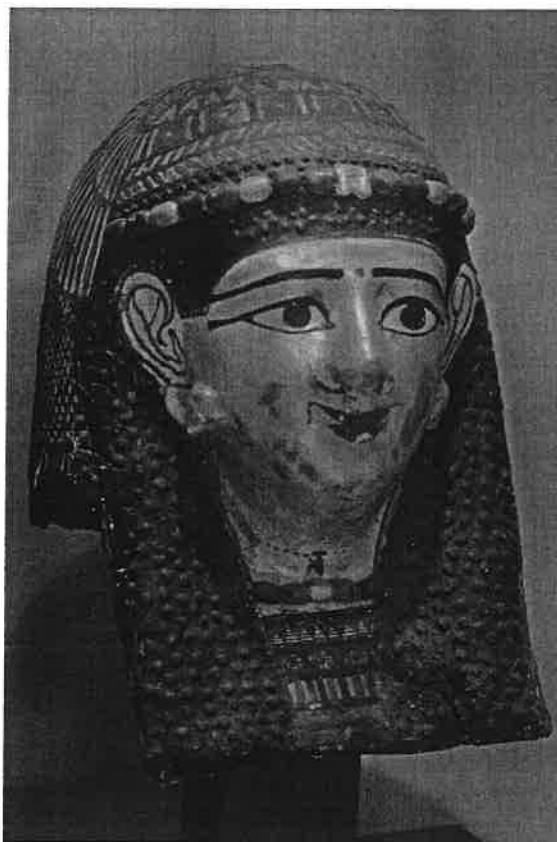


Figure 136. Starting in the Middle Kingdom, masks made of cartonnage were placed over the head and sometimes over the shoulders of the mummy. This mask, in Hildesheim Museum (No. 1258), shows a woman wearing an elaborate wig, and dates to the end of the Ptolemaic period. Real beads adorn her neck and crown her head. Her face is gilded to emphasize her metamorphosis into a divine being after her death, as the flesh of the gods was thought to be of gold, their bones of silver, and their hair of lapis lazuli.

Photo Salima Ikram.

hair of lapis lazuli. Then the body was wrapped in linen bandages interspersed with protective amulets while priests read prayers over the corpse and burnt incense prior to escorting it to the tomb. The bandages provided physical protection for the mummy, while the prayers wove a metaphysical

protection around the body. Royal and elite mummies were often further enhanced by a mask that fit over the head and sometimes over the shoulders of the body. (Fig. 136.)

The seventy days of mummification were associated with the Osiris as they paralleled the length of time the star Sothis (Sirius), identified with Osiris, was absent from the sky. Obviously, actual desiccation might take a longer or shorter time, depending on the stoutness of the deceased; fatter people took longer to desiccate than thinner ones. However, for religious reasons, embalmers tried to maintain a seventy-day total for the preparation of the body, although we have examples of individuals whose mummification took much longer, such as Queen Meresankh III at Giza, whose embalming took 272 days. Whether this was due to her girth or to the fact that her tomb was unfinished at the time is unknown.

Amulets

An amulet is generally defined as a protective piece of jewellery. All classes of ancient Egyptian wore amulets to protect themselves against disease, misfortune, and attacks by snakes and scorpions, and to encourage good fortune, good health, fertility, and wealth. Certain amulets were worn to prevent specific diseases or were a part of a medical cure. Some amulets were made of precious materials, such as gold or semi-precious stones; the more mundane were of faience, and clay, or such natural objects as shells or pebbles.

The efficacy of an amulet at times depended on what it was made of or on its colour. Thus, if a red stone amulet were unavailable, a red faience one would suffice, as the emphasis was on its being red, symbolic of the sun, fire, and blood. Special amulets were placed on the mummy as aids on the journey to the Afterlife and to ensure a safe arrival. Thus, *djed* pillars, the symbol of Osiris and his vertebral column, were placed at the mummy's back; a headrest was placed under the neck to prevent the head from rolling off; and *wadjet* eyes of Horus were placed all over the body to protect it. The chief amongst these amulets was the heart scarab. This large scarab was placed over the deceased's heart and inscribed with a spell from the Book of the Dead that would ensure that the deceased safely arrived in the Afterworld. The favoured inscription was Spell 30: 'Oh my heart I have from my mother, O my heart that I had on earth, do not rise up against me as a witness in the presence of the Lord of Things; do not speak against me concerning what I have done, do not bring up against me anything I have done in the presence of the Great God, Lord of the West.' (Fig. 137.)



Figure 137. Both the living and the dead wore amulets for protection. These funerary amulets made out of faience, now in Leipzig Museum, include a winged scarab, several djed pillars, symbols of Osiris, indicating stability, tyt amulets associated with Isis and the flow of the blood, wadjet eyes to protect and resurrect, ib, or heart, amulets in the shape of a jar, and images of different divinities. Photo Salima Ikram.

Funerals, Funerary Processions, and Tomb Equipment

Once the seventy days of mummification were completed, the body, laid on a sled, was transported to the tomb in a funeral procession. At its most basic, the procession consisted of family members and friends, carrying grave goods, as well as of priests to perform the final rites. Elaborate funerals included not only friends and family but also hired mourners, who would wail, rend their garments, and heap dust on their heads; in addition, there were several priests in the procession who burnt incense and recited prayers along the route. The plentiful grave goods that were to accompany the deceased to the hereafter were carried by a host of bearers. A curious object

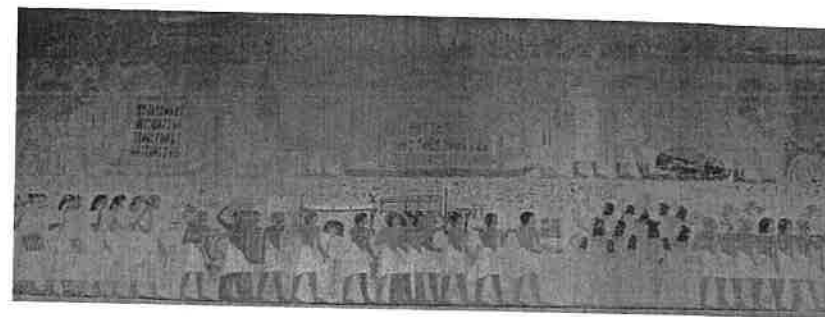


Figure 138. In addition to a coffin that was pulled on a sledge, funerary processions such as that of Ramose at Thebes included mourners, people bearing grave goods, and ritual items like the tekenu, an obscure object resembling a kneeling person that was wrapped in cloth or an animal-skin and dragged on a sledge before the coffin. Photo Salima Ikram.

called the *tekenu* also was part of this procession from the Middle Kingdom onward. In the Middle Kingdom, it appears to have been either a wrapped figure that was crouching or that was in the foetal position, with only its head visible. In the New Kingdom the *tekenu* was shown as an entirely wrapped bundle, or with its head and sometimes an arm showing. Its precise identity and role in the funerary ritual is enigmatic. (Fig. 138.)

At the tomb, priests, assisted by the eldest son and heir (or daughter, if there were no sons), performed the necessary funerary rituals. The most important of these was the Opening of the Mouth (*wepet-r*) ritual. The eldest son, wearing the special leopard-skin of the *sem*, or funerary priest, performed this ceremony on the (sometimes encoffined) corpse, touching the eyes, nose, mouth, ears, and face of the mummy with sacred implements, including an adze, while reciting appropriate prayers and burning incense. This ceremony restored the five senses to the body and readied it to make the journey to the land of Osiris and eternal life. A funerary dance, associated with the city of Buto, performed by two men wearing basketry headdresses reminiscent of Osiris's *atef* crown, formed a part of the ritual for rejuvenation. In the presence of the deceased, the priests and mourners consumed a final funerary banquet consisting of meat, bread, beer, wine, and other foods. Once the banquet was over, the body was placed in a coffin. (Fig. 139.)

Coffins were made of wood or cartonnage, and sometimes of pottery. The form of the coffins changed over time, varying between rectangular boxes and anthropomorphic containers; the latter first became popular in the New Kingdom, with the form surviving until the end of Pharaonic pagan history.



Figure 139. The Opening of the Mouth ceremony, carried out by the deceased's heir or close relative in the role of the sem priest (wearing a leopard-skin), restored the five senses to the mummy. This was one of the most important parts of the funerary ritual, and even elite youngsters, such as the one in this coffin now in Munich, were accorded elaborate funerary rites. Photo Salima Ikram.

Most Old Kingdom coffins were relatively plain, enhanced only by images of the palace façade and a pair of eyes through which the mummy could look out. During the Middle Kingdom, coffins became elaborately inscribed with the Coffin Texts (see Chapter 5), which provided a map and a set of instructions for the deceased's journey to reach the hereafter. Anthropomorphic coffins of the 18th Dynasty were decorated with fewer texts; occasionally, they were enhanced with images of funerary deities. During the New Kingdom, in some instances, the mummy was not placed just in one coffin, but in a series of coffins, one inside the other, similar to nested Russian dolls. Coffins from Dynasty 19 onward were elaborately painted with images of many different deities and were also heavily inscribed with funerary texts to help the deceased achieve a fulfilled Afterlife. From Dynasty 21, the coffins, rather than the tombs, provided the deceased with the requisite spells necessary for survival in the hereafter. Late period coffins varied in their complexity, and those from the Graeco-Roman period often just consisted of a painted cartonnage case that closely followed the form of the body, almost like another shroud. (Fig. 140.)

The coffins of royalty and of the wealthy were placed in yet another final container: a sarcophagus. The word *sarcophagus* is derived from the Greek

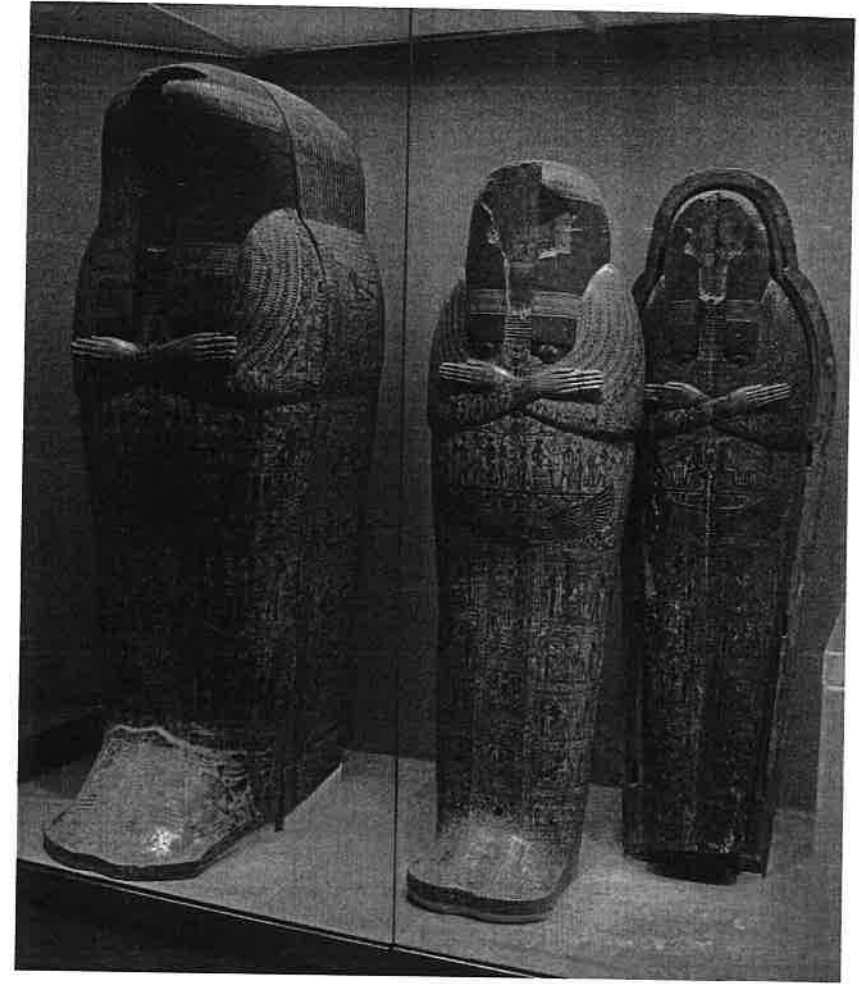


Figure 140. The mummy was placed in a series of coffins, such as these belonging to Nany and now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, before being interred in a tomb or in a stone sarcophagus in a tomb. Coffin style changed greatly over time, these yellow coffins are typical of the 21st and early 22nd Dynasties. Photo Salima Ikram.

for 'flesh-eater', apparently because of a (mistaken) Hellenic belief that certain stones that were used to make these containers actually consumed the body. Sarcophagi, generally made of stone, provided further protection for the body. Owing to its bulk the sarcophagus was placed in the burial

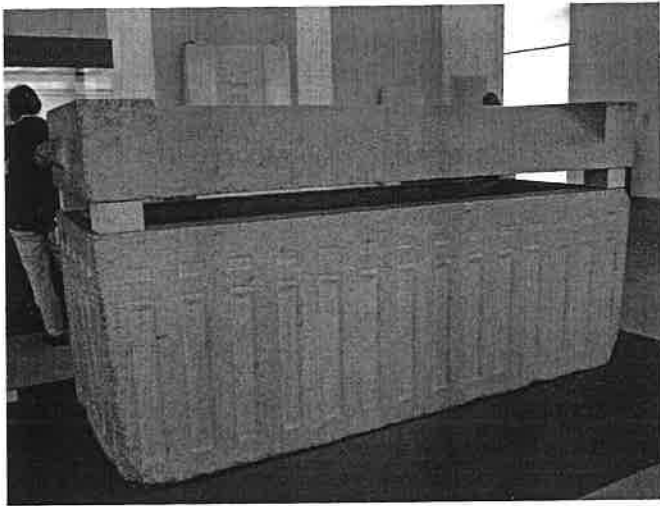


Figure 141. Stone sarcophagi often contained a coffin or a cartonnage-wrapped mummy.

This granite example, from the Old Kingdom cemetery at Giza, now in Hildesheim (No. 3177), is enhanced with a façade reminiscent of the niched walls of houses. The bosses on either end of the lid were used to move it around and are a feature of many large stone objects. Ideally, these were removed once the sarcophagus was in place, although this did not always happen. Photo Salima Ikram.

chamber prior to the funeral, and the encoffined body placed within it. Stone sarcophagi were used by royalty and nobility from the Old Kingdom until the New Kingdom; at that juncture, stone became almost exclusively reserved for royalty until the 26th Dynasty. (Fig. 141.)

In addition to the enclosed body, the burial chamber was filled with the grave goods that would be used by the deceased in the Afterworld. Grave goods included food and drink, furniture, clothing, shoes, toilette boxes, jewellery, cosmetics, perfumes, games, tools, weapons, funerary texts, inscribed on papyrus, *shabtis* (*ushabtis*) or servant figures that served the dead and would work in their place should any labour be required by the gods, and statues of the deceased. Once the burial chamber had been filled, it was hermetically sealed. Ideally, the door was closed forever, although generally tomb robbers breached the sealed doors and plundered the tomb not too long after the burial had taken place.

Although robbing a tomb was regarded as a heinous crime, it was a fairly common practice in antiquity, and was probably carried out by the very

people who had helped construct the tomb, or by the priests that were supposed to care for it. However, if tomb robbers were apprehended, they were severely punished, particularly if they had desecrated a royal tomb, the final resting place of a god. A papyrus dating to the 21st Dynasty details the trial and convictions of thieves who desecrated the tombs in the Valley of the Kings – they were sentenced to death by impalement.

Cemeteries and Tombs

Cemeteries were generally situated on the west bank of the Nile, identified with the setting sun and death. When this was impractical owing to the course of the river and the associated arable land, tombs' locations were changed. However, the grammar of a tomb's internal decoration provided a clue as to which way was supposed to represent east and the rising sun that symbolised resurrection. Some sites were regarded as especially sacred, such as Abydos, which was associated with mythological events (the Osiris myth), or Saqqara, which was connected to the blessed tombs of Djoser and Imhotep, and often people chose to be buried at such a location so that they could benefit from the site's holiness.

Tombs were houses for the dead and the final repository of the mummy. (Fig. 142.) The main function of the tomb was to protect the body of the deceased, provide a place for the funerary cult, and act as a magical machine that recreated the cosmos and helped the deceased enjoy eternal life. Ideally, they were made of stone so that they could last forever. However, this was feasible only for royalty and the elite. Poorer people made do with what they could afford, aided by religious texts to achieve an eternal existence (see Chapter 5). Throughout Egyptian history, the most basic tomb consisted of a hole dug into the desert surface that was marked by a mound or tumulus, a mud-brick or stone stela, and an offering place.

In dynastic times, tombs consisted of two parts: a super-structure where the deceased's cult was celebrated, the site of prayers and offerings (*bwet aat* or *shepes*), and a sub-structure where the deceased was buried (*kbenet*). (Fig. 143.) The underground chamber was the equivalent of the Underworld, the realm of Osiris; the shaft or passage leading from the surface – often within or close to the tomb chapel – was a liminal area of transition, akin to the passage to the Underworld. The tomb chapel was in the land of the living, where the *ka* and *ba* could interface with the living, and its decoration associated it with solar imagery. Thus, the deceased was linked with the sun god Re and with



Figure 142. The tomb of Niankhnum and Khnumhotep at Saqqara typifies the idea of tomb as house. This structure has a courtyard in front and an internal one around which rooms are organized. Light enters the chambers through small slits high up in the wall, thus keeping the rooms cool. Photo Salima Ikram.

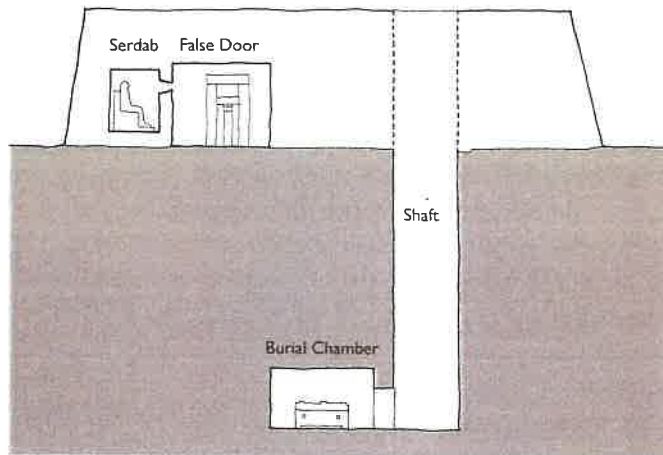


Figure 143. This mastaba illustrates the two main portions of a tomb, the super- and sub-structures. It also shows a false door, and the serdab, containing a statue of the deceased. Drawing Nicholas Warner.



Figure 144. The rock-cut tombs at Beni Hasan give a sense of tomb-as-house, with courtyards and columned porticoes carved out of the living rock. The proto-Doric columns support a stone roof that is carved to imitate a wooden one. Photo Salima Ikram.

Osiris, both divinities who were involved with rebirth, resurrection, and eternal life. The chapels were the portion of the tombs that could be visited and still are today; in antiquity, the burial chambers were sealed to protect the dead at rest, as well as their funerary goods.

Tombs were generally of two types: rock cut and free standing, although there are plenty of examples that have elements of both kinds of architecture, depending on the tomb owner's wealth and the geography and geology of the cemetery. Rock-cut tombs were cut straight into stone and were more common in the limestone and sandstone cliffs of Upper Egypt. These were carved horizontally into cliff faces and consisted of one or more chambers, sometimes columned. (Fig. 144.) More elaborate tombs had exterior courtyards and porticoes. Shaft tombs were simpler, consisting of vertical shafts culminating in one or more chambers. The cult place of these tombs was a simple offering emplacement at the mouth of the shaft, bearing the name and titles of the deceased. Such tombs were used throughout ancient Egyptian history. Tombs from the Graeco-Roman period followed more classical models and consisted of *loculi* (*sing.* *loculus*), basically a series of human-sized



Figure 145. Graeco-Roman burials were most commonly placed in loculi, such as these at Kom el-Shugafa at Alexandria. These slots were sealed with a stone slab, with the tomb owner's name painted or carved on it. Some mausolea belonged to a single family, although other larger tombs acted more as a general cemetery and contained the bodies of several different groups. Photo Salima Ikram.

rectangular slots carved into solid rock into which the mummified bodies were inserted. (Fig. 145.)

Owing to the absence of solid rock, built tombs were most common in Lower Egypt, although examples of this type also exist in the south. Ideally, such tombs were stone constructions, but during Egypt's early history, prior to the 3rd Dynasty and the construction of Djoser's Step Pyramid, they were made of mud brick. Poorer people have used mud-brick constructions throughout Egyptian history. (Fig. 146.)

Amongst constructed tombs, the most common tomb shape was that of the *mastaba* (Arabic for 'bench', reflecting the similarity between the tomb's shape and the benches found outside traditional Arab homes). In the early



Figure 146. A false door, such as this one belonging to Khesi at Saqqara, was a crucial component of a tomb, for it was the point at which the spirit of the dead could move between the worlds of the living and the dead. False doors were crowned by a cavetto cornice and consisted of a tablet at the top showing an image of the deceased before a table of offerings, and a series of lintels and door-jambs inscribed with the name and titles of the deceased along with an offering formula and images of family members. Offerings to the dead were placed on an altar before the false door. Photo Salima Ikram.

Old Kingdom, these were solid constructions with niches containing offering slabs or stelae and statues on the east side of the building. However, they were soon constructed as if they were houses, with a series of rooms including what might be a lavatory. Mastabas (and some pyramids) also had a room called a *serdab*, Arabic for 'cellar'. These rooms generally contained statues of the deceased and were either closed entirely or had small slits through which the deceased could watch activities taking place in the tomb.

Later on, in the New Kingdom, most free-standing tombs of the nobility took the shape of scaled-down temples, complete with pylons, courts, and



Figure 147. Before he was king, Horemheb began building a tomb at Saqqara. After ascending the throne, he started a new tomb in the Valley of the Kings and also added the royal uraeus to the foreheads of his images in his Saqqara tomb to indicate the change in his status. Ultimately, he was buried in the Valley of the Kings and his Saqqara tomb was used for his wife and other family members. Photo Salima Ikram.

colonnades; mini-pyramids capped a portion of the structure. Graeco-Roman tombs were very variable in their form. Some, particularly those at Tuna el-Gebel, were shaped like houses, complete with false windows, picket fences, and drain pipes. A curious group of tombs in Dakhla Oasis consisted of a series of vaulted burial chambers and chapels, topped by a mud-brick pyramid – the last pyramids made in Egypt.

Royal tombs always differed in architecture and decoration from the tombs of commoners. Kings' tombs were regarded as highly sacred sites as they were the burial places of deities. In the Old and Middle Kingdoms, their super-structures took the form of enormous pyramids, and they had simple sub-structures, often a single room that held the body and the grave goods that accompanied the deceased into the hereafter. Kings' mortuary

cults were celebrated in a series of temples that were part of the funerary complex that was physically attached to the pyramid (see Chapter 5). The New Kingdom saw a significant change in this arrangement: the substructure was separated from the super-structure or cult place. This may have been due to an increased desire to ensure the security of the royal burials, as well as a result of changes in state religion as Thebes and the god Amun replaced the supremacy of Re and the Memphite region. From Dynasty 18 until the Third Intermediate period, kings were interred in a remote desert valley, now known as the Valley of the Kings. Their burial chambers consisted of long passageways with chambers coming off of them cut deep into the rock. The cult places for the rulers of this period, their memorial temples or Temples of Millions of Years, were located at the desert margins (see Chapter 5). These were where the active worship of the kings and their royal *ka* took place. In addition to the tombs where they were buried, kings (and occasionally elites) sometimes had cenotaphs, or tombs that did not contain the body of the deceased but provided a focal point for the continuation of their memory.

Decorating the tomb was a very important part of constructing a magical space that recreated the cosmos, thereby permitting the deceased to live in an eternal and perfect world. Images and text were charged with power, as the Egyptians believed that they both had the ability to come to life and be reified, and they were a crucial component of the tomb. If the tomb were robbed and the mummy was destroyed, the images on the tomb walls would provide the soul with an alternative source of sustenance and a body to reanimate. Including statues of the deceased in the tomb was also crucial for this reason. (Fig. 147.)

Royal and private tombs were differently decorated, reflecting the dissimilar roles of their owners. The Afterlife was far more serious for a king than for anyone else. Even in the hereafter the king was responsible to the gods and charged with maintaining the cosmos and control over Egypt, and with helping the sun god Re vanquish his enemies so that the world could continue to exist. The Afterlife of the non-royals was a more idyllic version of life on earth, with few responsibilities.

Initially, the burial chambers of pyramids were unadorned; however, from the end of the 5th Dynasty to the end of the Old Kingdom they were inscribed with Pyramid Texts that helped the king achieve eternal existence and aided him in his battles to maintain *maat*. Middle Kingdom burial chambers were undecorated; perhaps royal funerary texts of this period were written on papyrus and placed in the tomb. The temples associated with royal burials tended to be well decorated from the 5th Dynasty onward. Prior to that, only the



Figure 148. Hatshepsut's funerary temple at Deir el-Bahari illustrated several events specific to her reign, such as the expedition that she sent to Punt to acquire incense trees that she then dedicated to Amun. Images of this exotic land, perhaps located on the East African coast, show houses on stilts and the turtles and fish that inhabited the sea (probably the Red Sea) that bordered Punt. Photo Salima Ikram.

causeways connecting the temples were adorned, often with images reflecting daily life or particular events from the king's reign. The decorative themes in the mortuary temples from the 5th Dynasty onward focussed on the role of divine kingship, with the king shown enacting various rituals, such as the slaying of the hippopotamus, symbol of chaos, running the *heb-sed*, and erecting pillars that alluded to the enduring nature of Osiris and kingship. Images of gods supporting the king were also a crucial part of the decoration.

New Kingdom burial chambers were enhanced by texts from a variety of funerary books (see Chapter 5), and by images of the gods assisting the king in his quest for an eternal existence amongst them. The accompanying temples continued to be decorated with images of gods and kings, as well as with significant events from the king's reign. Thus, Hatshepsut recorded an expedition to Punt at Deir el-Bahari, Ramesses II celebrated his victory at Qadesh in the Ramesseum, and Ramesses III showed himself repelling the attacks of the Sea Peoples. (Fig. 148.) Depictions of more prosaic activities, such as market scenes, or scenes showing the changing seasons such as were found on Old Kingdom causeways, were virtually non-existent by the New Kingdom.



Figure 149. The hunting of animals that represented chaos, such as the hippopotamus, ensured that maat was being upheld and that the forces of isfet were not in the ascendancy. This scene in the tomb of Mereruka at Saqqara depicts a group of men harpooning the animals, with the tomb owner in the background. The artist who carved this scene made a mistake in the position of the crocodile's feet, and they were re-carved. When the tomb was completed the error would have been covered with a thin layer of plaster and paint, but that is now missing. Photo Salima Ikram.

Royal tombs of the Third Intermediate period at Tanis were inscribed with images of the king and gods, as well as with a plethora of texts designed to ensure eternal life and the unification of the king with the gods. No royal tombs from the Late period onward have been discovered thus far.

From the Old Kingdom until the Ramesside era private tomb chapels were enhanced with scenes of daily life: farmers at work in the fields, the tomb owner hunting and fishing, butchers and bakers at work, people dining at banquets, and other activities. These images can be interpreted both literally, as records of what was necessary for an ideal eternal existence, and on a metaphoric level. Thus, in a scene of the tomb owner hunting in the desert or on the Nile, the deceased was not only enjoying a sporting activity but was also routing chaos and maintaining *maat*. (Fig. 149.) Other images involving agricultural activities were allusions to funerary texts that describe the



Figure 150. The royal tomb of Horemheb in the Valley of the Kings (KV57) was decorated traditionally with images of the king making offerings to different gods and being blessed by them in return. Photo T. M. Ramadan.

pleasures and riches of the hereafter. For the most part, few funerary texts appeared in tombs until the Middle Kingdom, when prayers and invocations to the gods such as Osiris became common. As time passed, images that were used by kings in an earlier period were adopted by the elite after the kings had moved on to new sets of images and texts. Thus, some Middle Kingdom tombs displayed portions of the Pyramid Texts that were no longer to be found in royal sepulchres.

From the Ramesside period on, the number of images of daily life decreased dramatically in private tombs. These were replaced by images of the gods, as well as by many more prayers and invocations to the deities. Throughout their history, non-royal burial chambers were rarely decorated, and when they were, the images reflected the offerings buried with the dead. In some rare cases, late New Kingdom burial chambers were inscribed with religious texts to aid the deceased's journey to the Afterlife. (Fig. 150.)

During the Third Intermediate period few Egyptians constructed elaborate sepulchres; their focus was on their heavily inscribed coffins. The decoration of Late Period elite tombs, particularly those dating to the 25th and 26th Dynasties, followed the ideals of the Old and Middle Kingdoms.

Graeco-Roman tomb decoration varied depending on where the tomb was located. Some tombs followed a classical scheme of decoration with images of Greek and Roman divinities juxtaposed with Egyptian ones, while other tombs showed scenes of daily life, but the people in them were carved or painted in an Egyptian Hellenistic style, an amusing blend of the classical and Egyptian traditions.

Members of ancient Egypt's royalty and nobility started building their tombs quite early in their lives, as such elaborate constructions required time, money, and attention. According to Herodotus, a pyramid took twenty years to build. No doubt this was the case for certain pyramids, but the length of time actually varied depending on the size of the construction and the number of people needed to build it. Many tombs, both royal and private, were unfinished at the time of their owners' death, and they were often left thus as heirs were loath to continue to pay for them.

Mortuary Cults

The funerary cults of the wealthy were sustained through offerings and prayers provided by loyal family members and, more important, through endowments made by the deceased. During his or her lifetime, the tomb owner dedicated lands or produce to pay the priests who looked after the tomb and the cult. Hepdjefa, a noble from Asyut, inscribed instructions in his tomb for the division of his estate and the payment of his mortuary priests. These mortuary priests, who worked in rotation, were called the *bemu-ka*, or servants of the *ka*. Their duties involved making offerings (which reverted to them after consecration) to the soul of the tomb owner, maintaining the tomb, offering up prayers, and safeguarding the burial. Royal cults were much larger and more complex, and the maintenance of those cults was often affiliated with divine cult temples, particularly in the New Kingdom. Ultimately, regardless of whether a cult was royal or private, the descendants of the deceased would divert the income to their own cults or to other uses. This is why decorating and equipping the tomb was vital: the images and offerings would provide the soul of the deceased with sustenance and prayers throughout eternity.

Tombs were inscribed with the name and titles of the deceased, together with a series of standard offering formulae to be read by priests, family members, and passers-by to invoke the spirit of the dead and to ensure that his or her soul would continue to flourish in the hereafter. The most ancient

and common offering formulae was the *betep-di-nisw* formula, translated as 'a gift or boon that the king gives', and it was inscribed on lintels, false doors, and offering tables. The formula ensured that the deceased was remembered, blessed by gods, and provided with the standard offerings of a thousand loaves of bread, a thousand jars of beer, oxen, fowl, linen, natron, and all things good and pure. Other prayers, such as the 'Admonitions to the Living', were inscribed in tombs and asked visitors to the tomb to recite the offering formulas for the deceased; in exchange, the *akh* form of the tomb owner would praise the visitors to the divine king and the gods, and ensure their safety within the necropolis.

Curses

Much fuss has been made about curses inscribed in tombs. Only a few of these exist; most were aimed at those who desecrated the tomb by entering it in an unclean state or who intended to harm its occupant. The inscription on the mastaba of Khentika, called Ikhekhi (6th Dynasty), at Saqqara reads:

All who enter my tomb in an impure state, having eaten abominations ... they shall not be pure to enter into [it] or there will be judgement against them in the Council [of gods] ... I shall seize his neck like a bird ... I shall put fear of myself in him ... so that the living may fear the [beings] who go to the West ...

The inscription in the First Intermediate period tomb of Tefibi at Asyut was more severe: the son of the desecrator would not live to inherit, no one would carry out the thief's funerary ceremonies, the thief's spirit would be deprived of libations and offerings, and the spirit would perish in the Afterworld. Such texts, however, were few and far between, and none has been found in a royal tomb.

The Living and the Dead

Being dead and inhabiting Amenti, the Afterworld, did not mean that the Egyptians ceased to be connected to the world of the living. In addition to funerary priests, family members regularly visited their dead ancestors, giving offerings, reciting prayers, and relating current family news. This custom continues in modern Egypt. Special attention was paid to ancestral tombs during religious festivals, such as the Theban Festival of the Valley.

These cemetery visits also provided an opportunity for the living to ask the dead for their supernatural assistance and advice or, in some instances, to demand that unquiet ghosts stop troubling the living. In addition to making verbal requests, supplicants left letters to the dead, which have been found in several cemeteries and date to all periods. These letters were inscribed on papyri, on linen fragments, and, most often, on pottery bowls that held offerings to tempt the deceased's spirit to help the living. One letter written by a widow and her children to her deceased husband asks his aid in obtaining justice and wreaking vengeance on the person who was attempting to defraud them of their inheritance. Other letters requested help in curing disease, as well as in obtaining further assistance from Osiris and other gods. For the Egyptians, the connection between the dead and the living was strong, and death was not really an end, but a beginning.