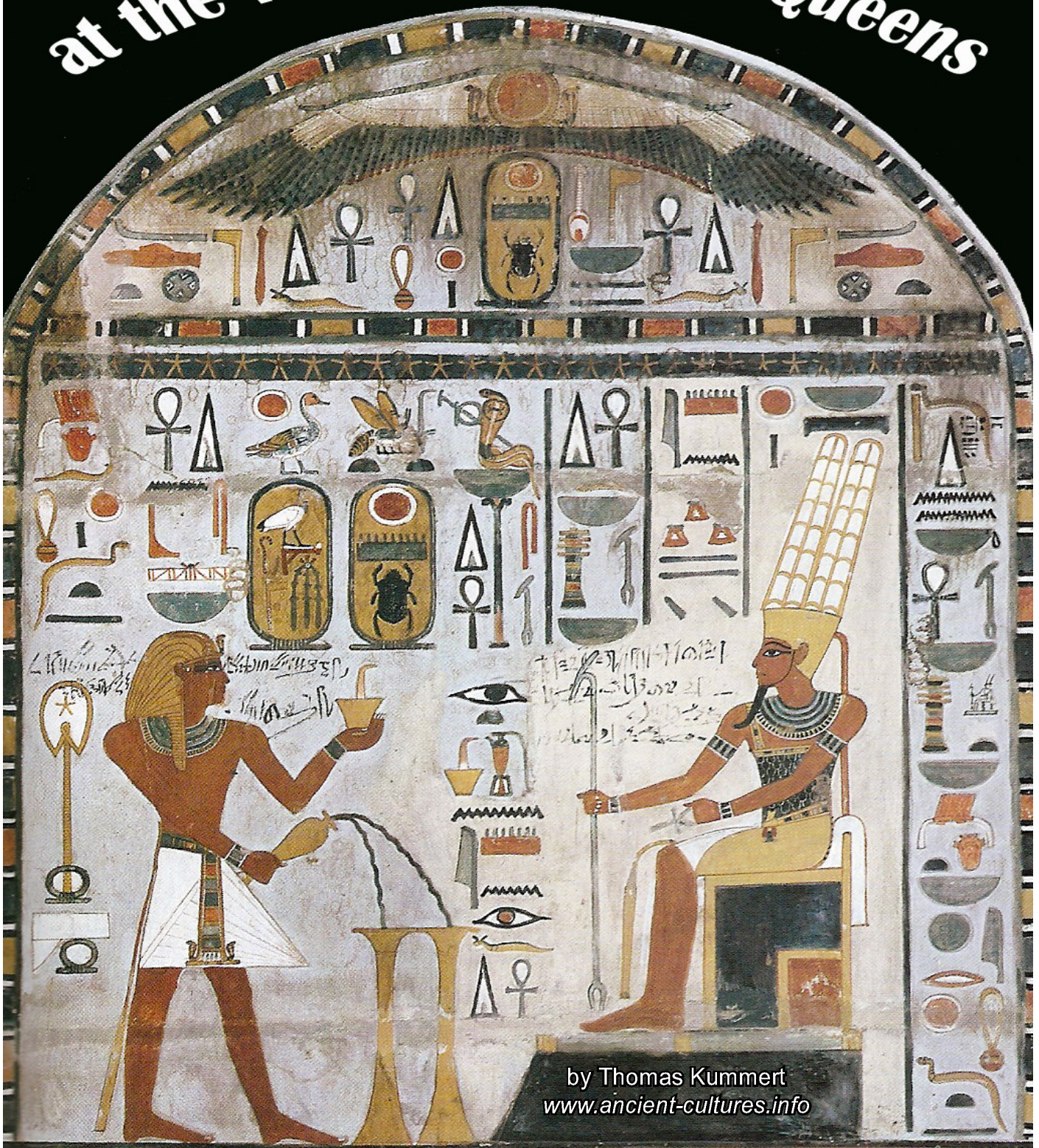


Impressive Royal Tombs at the Valley of Kings & Queens

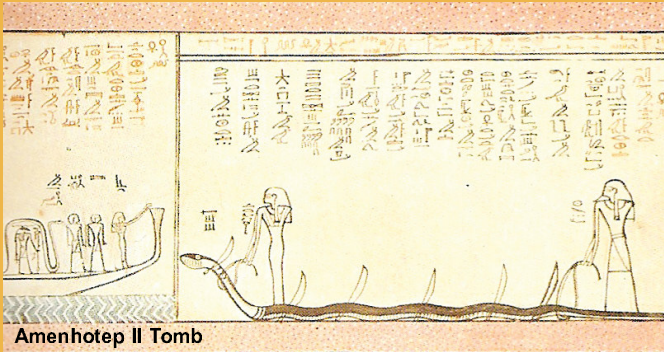


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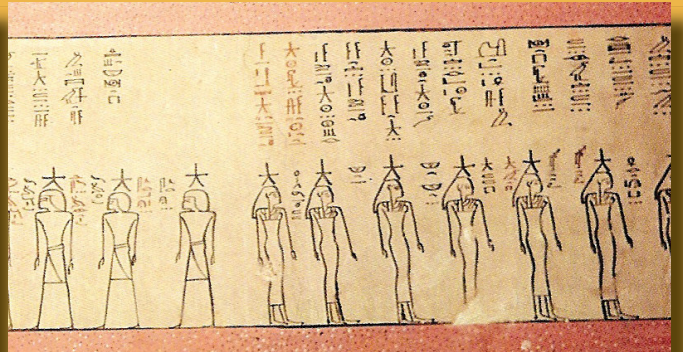
Tutankhamun & Amun-Re Hathor chapel

Egypt is certainly home to the largest number and also the most impressive royal tombs in human history. In my first article on Egyptian archaeology, I have covered the unsurpassed pyramid building efforts of the ancient architects during the Old Kingdom Period from 2707-2216BC.

Today I will focus on the rock-cut tombs of the New Kingdom Period from 1550-1070BC in the Valley of Kings or *Biban el-Moluk* and Valley of Queens or *Biban el-Harim*.



Amenhotep II Tomb



These valleys are situated in the mountain range on the Nile side opposite of the important city of Luxor called in antiquity *weset* or *ipet-resit* in the old Egyptian language.

Biban el-Muluk

To date in the east and west Valley of Kings, 65 different tombs have been found of which 36 tombs can be allocated to specific rulers of the 19-21st dynasties, which were part of the New Kingdom Period.

Certainly the most well known tomb is that of Tutanchamun, because it is one of the very few which was not robbed in antiquity. The world was stunned in 1920, when Howard Carter discovered the untouched tomb of the rather

unimportant pharaoh Tutanchamun, which was nevertheless fully loaded with golden funerary items and a series of 5 sarcophagi inside. Another article will be dedicated solely to the richly equipped tomb of Tutanchamun.

Imagine how the tombs of the most important and long serving rulers must have been fitted out, such as that of Ramses II for example, who served for 66 years.

The tombs in the valley have been numbered according to the sequence of their discovery. So the first tomb discovered was that of Ramses VII and the last one so far that of Tutanchamun, today

numbered 62.

All pharaohs of the New Kingdom Period have been buried here except two. Ahmose the first ruler of the 19th dynasty was possibly buried close by at Dra Abu el-Naga. And Amenhotep IV, who introduced the much debated monotheism, renamed himself Akhenaten and is better known today as Echnaton. He was buried at his new capital Achetaten today's Tell el-Amarna.

The two female rulers during this period Hatshepsut and Twosret were also buried at the Valley of Kings.

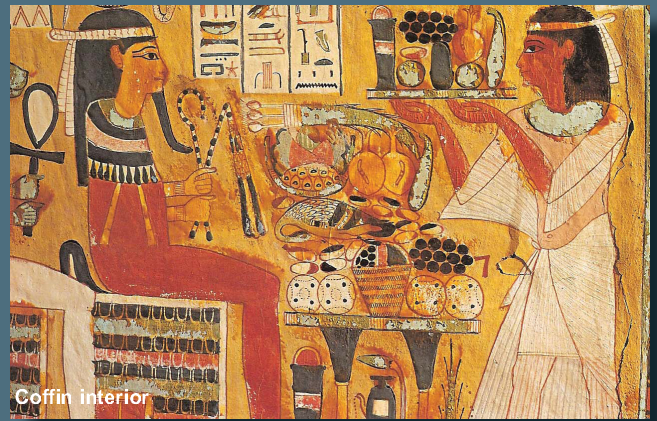
Most tombs offer many colorful relief scenes giving us a very detailed picture of life and death in ancient Egypt. Generally the tombs



Twosret Tomb



Anubis preparing mummy



Coffin interior

are well preserved because of the dry desert climate. But in recent years the ever increasing stream of tourist visitors have damaged the tomb walls and paintings through human sweat and exhaling affecting the wall surfaces through moisture.

Tomb architects followed the same concept with 3 sections of corridors. The first corridor leading underground sometimes had side chambers, the second corridor was fitted with niches for offerings and the third corridor ended up in a hall leading to the burial chamber with a granite or alabaster sarcophagus.

Tomb Picture Programs

The detailed painted relief scenes, which cover all tomb walls and even ceilings, are a big surprise for first time visitors. These wall decorations

are described in a canon of 42 so-called books, which were kept and managed by temple priests.

They have been used by ancient tomb artisans for thousands of years, without any major changes, to copy scenes precisely onto those tomb walls in the Valley of Kings and Queens. First were the "pyramid texts", which were used for the pyramid of king Unas during the 5th dynasty. From the Middle Kingdom "coffin texts" were used to decorate the inside and outside of coffins and later sarcophagi.

Amduat Book of the Underworld

The most important of these books was the so-called *amduat*, or book of the underworld, which is divided into 12 night hours and underworld areas with different and specific dangers to be encountered. Each of these areas

was separated by a specific gate.

The *amduat* was first used during the 18th dynasty for the tomb of pharaoh Tuthmosis III and contains very detailed descriptions. The first night hour or area to be navigated for example was 120 Egyptian miles long. Later various enhanced *amduat* versions were developed from the initial text and picture program.

Book of the Dead

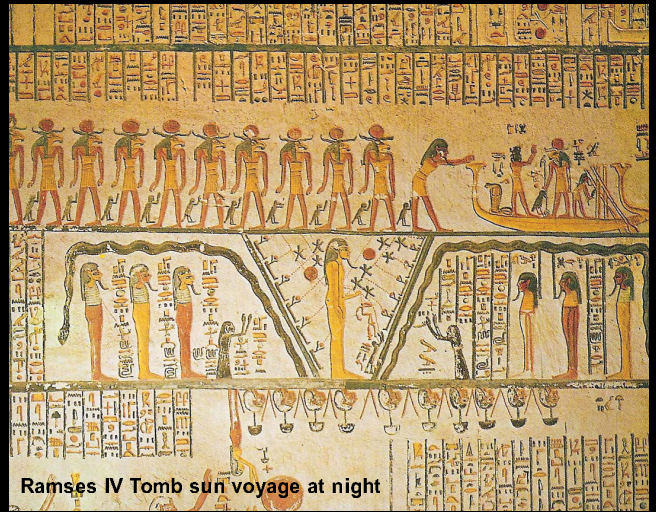
Next to the *amduat*, the book of the dead was the main religious reference work with texts to be used for tomb wall paintings. Up to 200 formulae of varying length with texts and vignettes were produced by different workshops resulting in different quality of text and vignettes on the same document. Some were produced on leather, but most on papyrus,



Ramses I Tomb



Ramses IV Tomb sun voyage at night



Ramses IV Tomb sun voyage at night

with one document started on leather and finished on papyrus. Vignettes normally were colored and text produced in black.

Surprisingly no manuscript contained all 200 texts. Also texts used did not follow the numbered sequence. The most complete use of texts was found in the tomb of Ptolemaic priest Iufankh using 165 chapters.

Gate Book

The so-called "gate book" was used for the first time in the tomb of pharaoh Horemheb. Like the *amduat*, it had 12 chapters which symbolized the 12 night hours and gates to cover the travel of the sun during night time through

the underworld.

Structured into a picture program with 100 scenes and written text, the gate book brings some order in the many existing versions during the New Kingdom. Egyptians saw their land as the center of the world and therefore believed that the sun had to travel through the underworld during night, to be able to rise the next day again.

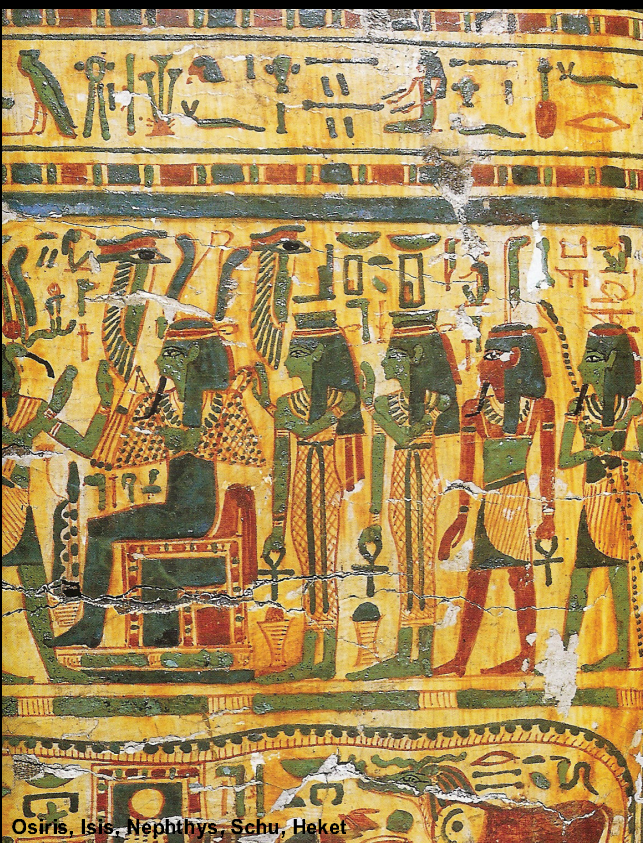
Every day was a rebirth and depicted as goddess Nut swallowing the sun with her mouth in the evening and giving rebirth to the sun in the morning like a child, traveling through her body at night.

This was an easy to understand

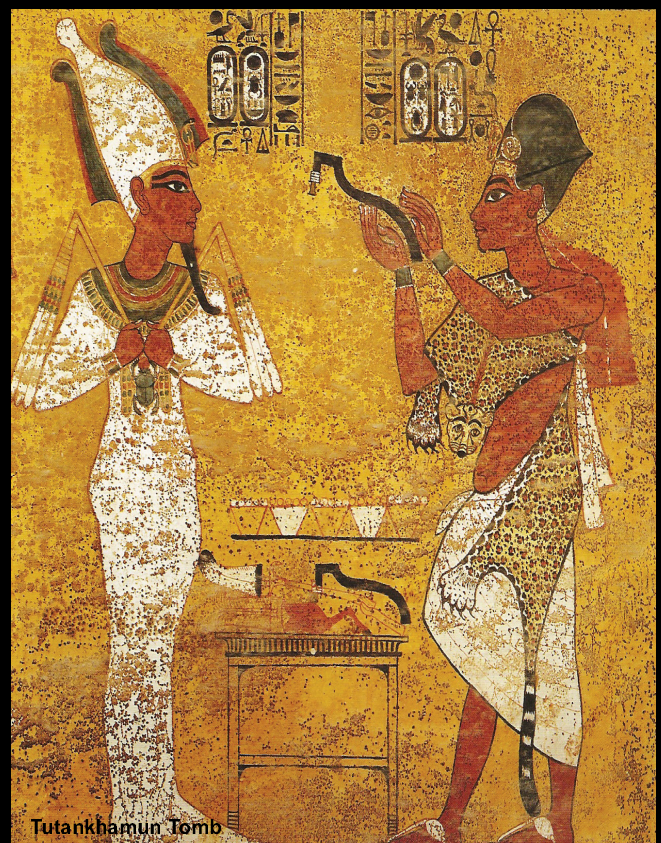
explanation to all and therefore goddess Nut is often painted on tomb ceilings stretching from west to east, and therefore called the book of the heavenly cow.

Cave Book & Sun Litany

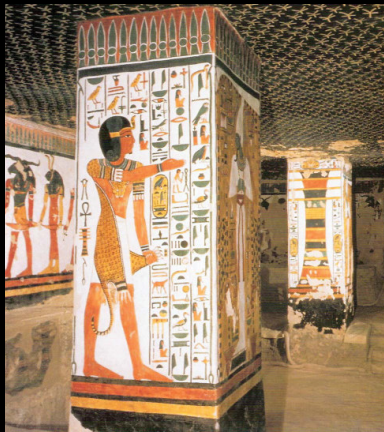
Other important books used by the tomb painters were the "cave book", which described in detail the areas of underworld punishment, again separated in 12 caves with dedicated gods responsible for the specific punishment. The "sun litany" contained 75 figures representing *cheperu* being various forms of divine appearances, or figures developed over time to become protector gods of the dead in their own right.



Osiris, Isis, Nephthys, Set, Heket



Tutankhamun Tomb



There were over 1,000 hieroglyphs used in those books and each hieroglyph sign had a specific color, the same sign with a different color had a different meaning. Colors used were black, white, red, blue, yellow and green. Although no mixed colors were used, shades thereof were permitted.

Biban el-Harim

In the Valley of Queens only 10 tombs have been found so far, including tombs of various princes such as Chaemweset and Amunherchopeshet, both sons of Ramses III.

The tomb of queen Nefertari, the most favored wife of Ramses II, has been well restored with relief worked out of stucco layers with many colored relief scenes.

These relief pictures include many excellent depictions of Nefertari, such as showing her playing a board game sitting under a baldachin.

Another scene shows her *ba* in form of a bird with human head, as well as depicting her praying to the sun, which is carried by 2 lions.

Others show the queen mummy on her death bed and, further on, in front of the important Osiris death trial everyone has to go through. As part of the procedure her heart is asked to report any misdeeds and as proof its weight is checked symbolically against a feather as counter weight, representing goddess Ma'at. In addition detailed texts

Another important tomb is that of queen Titi. Again all walls are richly decorated depicting Titi with truth and justice goddess Ma'at with her wide open wings protecting the deceased queen.

The walls show Titi with her husband Ramses in front of different gods, such as main mother goddess Isis, moon god Thot, hunting and war goddess Neith, as well as death god Osiris, Selket and death goddess Nephthys and Hathorkuh.

Old Egyptian Beliefs

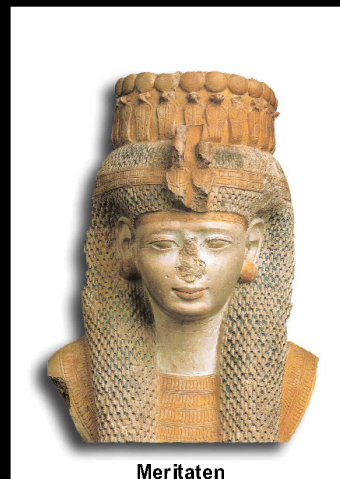
The religious beliefs of ancient Egyptians over 5,000 years ago were very complex with over 500 different deities they were worshipping. Let's start with the basics.

The human being consisted in their mind of 6 different parts, 3 were material and 3 were pure spiritual.

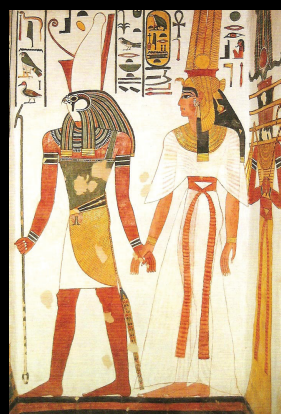
The material parts were the *chet* representing the human body, the *ren* their name and the *schut* was equal to their shadow. The differentiation of the spiritual parts was also very interesting with the *ka* representing non destroyable permanent life, the *ba* being the heart and personality and finally the *ach* was the person's soul.



Nefertiti



Meritaten



The *ka* was the spiritual copy of an individual with the imbedded idea of permanent reproduction. Therefore the birth creator god Chnum created a duplicate body out of clay on his potter wheel so that after death the *ka* could freely move between the burial chamber and the offering chapel to supply the deceased with food.

The *ba* ancient Egyptians believed, leaves the body at death and was depicted as a bird with human head, nevertheless it also could change form and move around, but would always return to the deceased grave at sun set.

The *ach* was believed to be the ghost of the deceased and seen as proof of heavenly immortality and a necessary liaison to eternity and was depicted as an Ibis with a crown.

Ma'at as Balance of all Things

Another important concept was Egyptians' belief in stability and balance of all things in the cosmos and their daily lives represented by truth and justice goddess Ma'at. Therefore pictured relief scenes on temple walls were identical for nearly 3,000 years. They showed past and present in temples built by new pharaohs to prove that ma'at balance was kept with repetition and duplicity.

Only gods could repeat creation or recreate balance. This was

why they believed that gods guaranteed *ma'at* through recreation and that the pharaoh was the only representative of all gods on earth and therefore their only liaison to these goods.

A clever concept to keep all your subjects focused on their hard labor and dutiful worshipping to take their minds off any rebellious ideas. Nevertheless they believed in having good days and bad days, because gods, ghosts and demons all existed in their world.

Death and Life after Death

Ancient Egyptians had a strong belief in life after death. In their thinking, the deceased pharaoh was still present through his statue, a stele, his mummy and tomb. Further they believed that the dead body could still speak, or deliver a message until being finally buried. Therefore daily food and live animals were delivered to his consumption and sacrifice to god's.

From the second century BC death trials became common. The deceased was led by god Anubis in front of the death penal of god Osiris for the deceased heart to report all deeds. This was the reason why all Egyptians aimed at an unquestionable life style, as this was a precondition for later resurrection. Everybody's heart was put on a balance with goddess Ma'at symbolized by a feather.

Eye & Mouth Opening Ritual

During the Old Kingdom Period the ritual of the mouth and eye opening ceremony was performed by priests with an Anubis jackal mask at the burial of the mummy to revive the deceased for his or her life after death before laying them to rest in their sarcophagus and as well to be able to speak at their death trial. What is known is little except that this ritual was also symbolically performed at all statues of the deceased.

Egyptian further believed that all deceased had to be buried following all rituals correctly, because otherwise their spirits would move around restlessly and bring evil to the living. Therefore amulets were worn, protective verses mumbled and self performed rituals done, plus priests were asked to perform various magical ceremonies to keep evil and bad spirits away.

It is interesting to learn that in ancient Egypt even wearing of nice cloths, jewelry, perfume, or playing board games had always religious reasons and were not done to show off, or demonstrate wealth, as is done today.

The biggest fear for ancient Egyptians was to die outside of Egypt. Therefore all soldiers, who died in battle, had to be brought back and buried in full ceremony within Egypt.



Farms on the Nile close to Aswan

For the same reason drowning was feared, because the body would be gone a burial would be impossible and no chance of afterlife resurrection.

Therefore priests created a special relief scene with main deity Horus standing on the Nile embankment holding up the "death book" and giving passing by drowned bodies the so important after death life.

Embalming Process

The old Egyptian embalming process was not described in detail anywhere and possibly thought an act too holy and secret in know how to be described on any document.

Before the Old Kingdom Period, the deceased got a simple burial in animal skin or wrapped in a papyrus mat and buried in the desert sands.

With the heat and very dry conditions body fluids were quickly extracted and human remains dehydrated quickly producing perfect natural mummies without any sophisticated mummification process.

As pointed out already, in Egyptian belief the deceased body had to be conserved to be able to enter after life. From animal meat conservation it was known to Egyptians that all organs had to be removed for proper conversation.

But additional treatment with natrona salt, not in liquid form, eliminated all body fluids in 35-40 days, some sources even mentioned 70 days. This salt was coming from the Kattara basin and also from Wadi Natrun, from where the name came.

But we have to be aware that mummification during the Old

Kingdom Period was not yet perfected, as only bones and some tissue survived in otherwise well preserved linen embalmment, the reason being that body organs were not yet removed.

Bodies of deceased pharaohs were washed outside any buildings at the so-called "purification tent" or *ibw*. The embalming process was done at the so-called "house of regeneration" or *per nefer*, which took up to 15 days. The outer linen enrollment was modeled to imitate clothing.

The Middle Kingdom Period achieved the next step of embalming techniques with the removal of the brain, which was only done for royal family members.

During the New Kingdom Period the embalming process was perfected with the removal of all organs, resulting in perfectly conserved mummies with complete skin and muscle tissue surviving over 3,500 years until today.

Body cavities were washed with palm wine and aromatic liquids, then filled with myrrh, cassia and incense. The organs were placed in four canopic jars for stomach, intestines, liver and lung.

Each jar was protected by a specific god with Amset depicted as human, Hapi as ape, Kebechsenuef as falcon and Duamutef as jackal, which received additional protection through deities Isis, Nephthys, Selkis and Neith.

Interestingly the heart remained in the dead body, but often separated, or packed in linen, or replaced by a holy skarabaeus beetle. The body was then filled up again with linen, or saw dust, or less frequently with Nile mud.

The side cut in the body to remove organs was closed with linen, a wax plate, or for pharaohs a gold plate was used.

Mummy masks depicting deceased were already used during the Old Kingdom. Scientists have established the wrappings of Egyptian mummies. Consisting of a total of 37 linen layers up to 4,800m of linen were used, which equals approximately 375m² of linen.

But imagine this, all body parts were separately enrolled, including each finger and toe, for royal mummies all fingers and toes were even covered with golden caps. And the face was especially modeled to look like the deceased.

Various protective amulets were enrolled in the linen layers, with one mummy found having up to 143 amulets for different purposes and threats which may occur in after life. The embalming ritual stopped finally in 700 AD with increasing Christianity.

Common Grave Furnishings

Wooden *ushabti* servant figures were used to assist the deceased in after life with daily work. Normally one *ushabti* was added for each day and shown doing typical jobs.

During the Middle Kingdom small models of artisan workshops, farms, bakeries, carpentries, weaver shops, butcheries were added to demonstrate the deceased's job and keep him busy in after life.

Typical sacrifice items were bread, beer, wine, corn, wheat, fruit, meat, chicken, ointments, oils, incense, make-up, various toiletries, clothes, sandals, ceramic pots, jars, all kitchen equipments, tools and also arms.

