

Chapter 7

The Journey to Eternity

Objective

To learn about how the ancient Egyptians perceived death and the afterlife.

Mystery

Why did the ancient Egyptians mummify the bodies of the deceased? What did they believe would happen to them when they died?

Discussion and Research Projects

1. What did the ancient Egyptians put in tombs to ensure the comfort and happiness of the deceased in the afterlife?
2. Describe the “opening of the mouth” ceremony and explain its purpose.
3. What dangers did the deceased face on their journey to the afterworld?
4. How did the deceased protect themselves from these dangers?
5. Describe what happened in the “weighing of the heart” ceremony.
6. Who was the first being to be mummified?
7. Describe the mummification process.
8. Why were animals mummified?

Creative Projects

1. Use **Activity Sheet 16** to learn about the “opening of the mouth” ceremony, which was performed on the deceased to restore the senses.
2. Use **Activity Sheet 17** to learn about the “weighing of the heart” ceremony that took place in the afterworld to determine if a deceased person could enjoy everlasting life.



3. Write a dialogue for the “opening of the mouth” and the “weighing of the heart” ceremonies. Make the required props and re-enact these ceremonies.
4. Do a series of drawings showing what happened to the deceased on the journey to the after-world. Start with the mummification process and end with the arrival of the deceased in the Land of the Gods.

FACT SHEET: The Journey to Eternity

Egyptian Civilization — Life after Death

The ancient Egyptians believed in immortality, and this influenced their attitude towards death. They regarded death as a temporary interruption, rather than the cessation of life. During the Old Kingdom, it was believed that only pharaohs could attain immortality. Around 2000 B.C., attitudes changed, however: everyone could live in the afterworld as long as the body was mummified and the proper elements were placed in the tomb. But since mummification was expensive, only the wealthy were able to take advantage of it.

To ensure the continuity of life after death, people paid homage to the gods, both during and after their life on earth. When they died, they were mummified so the soul would return to the body, giving it breath and life. Household equipment and food were placed in the tomb to provide for the person's needs in the afterworld. Funerary texts consisting of spells or prayers were also included to assist the dead on their journey to the afterworld.

To prepare the deceased for that journey, the “opening of the mouth” ceremony was performed on the mummy and the mummy case by priests. This elaborate ritual involved purification, censing (burning incense), anointing and incantations, as well as touching the mummy with ritual objects to restore the senses — the ability to speak, touch, see, smell and hear.

The journey to the afterworld was fraught with danger. Travelling on a solar bark, the mummy passed through the underworld, which was inhabited by serpents armed with long knives, fire-spitting dragons and reptiles with five ravenous heads. Upon arriving in the realm of the Duat (Land of the

Gods), the deceased had to pass through seven gates, reciting accurately a magic spell at each stop. If successful, they arrived at the Hall of Osiris, the place of judgement.

Here the gods of the dead performed the “weighing of the heart” ceremony to judge whether the person's earthly deeds were virtuous. The weighing of the heart was overseen by the jackal-headed god Anubis, and the judgement was recorded by Thoth, the god of writing.



A priest wearing an Anubis jackal mask performs funeral rites over a mummified body.

Drawing: Catherine Fitzpatrick
Photo: Harry Foster (CMC S98 3519)



The “opening of the mouth” ceremony

Photo: Harry Foster (CMC S98 3573)

Forty-two gods listened to the confessions of the deceased who claimed to be innocent of crimes against the divine and human social order. The person's heart was then placed on a scale, counterbalanced by a feather that represented Maat, the goddess of truth and justice. If the heart was equal in weight to the feather, the person was justified and achieved immortality. If not, it was devoured by the goddess Amemet. This meant that the person would not survive in the afterlife. When pharaohs passed the test, they became one with the god Osiris. They then travelled through the underworld on a solar bark, accompanied by the gods, to reach paradise and attain everlasting life.

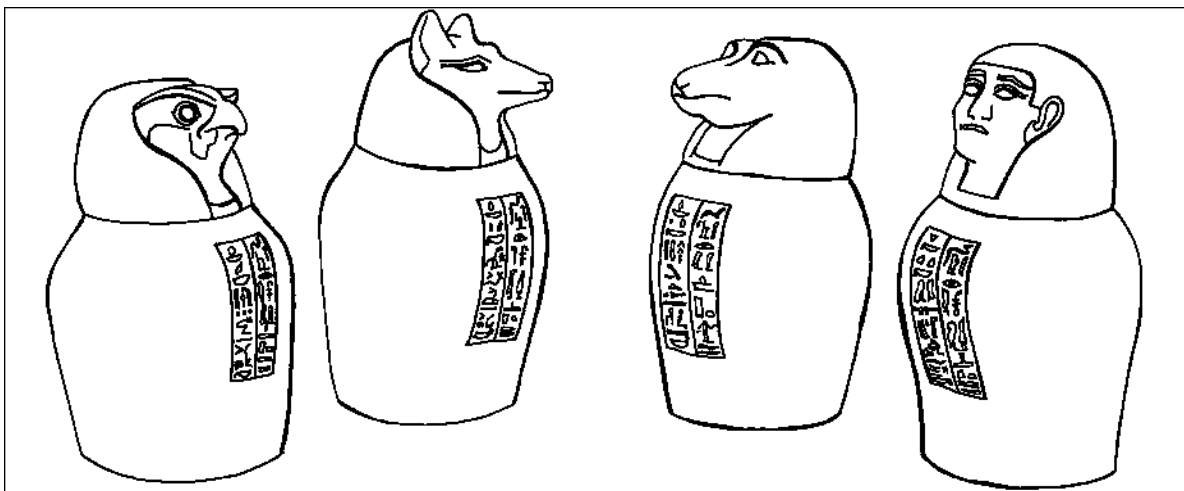


Priests mummifying the deceased
 Drawing: Catherine Fitzpatrick
 Photo: Harry Foster (CMC S98 3521)

Egyptian Civilization — Mummification

Mummification, the preservation of the body, was described in the ancient Pyramid Texts. With the death of Osiris, god of the dead, the cosmos fell into chaos and the tears of the gods turned into materials used to mummify his body. These materials included honey, resins and incense. Before mummification evolved, the corpse was placed in a sleeping fetal position and put into a pit, along with personal items such as clay pots and jewellery. The pit was covered with sand, which absorbed all the water from the body, thus preserving it.

The practice of mummification began in Egypt in 2400 B.C. and continued into the Graeco-Roman Period. Natron, a disinfectant and desiccating agent, was the main ingredient used in this process. A compound of sodium carbonate and sodium bicarbonate, natron essentially dried out the corpse. By removing the organs and packing the internal cavity with dry natron, the body



Canopic jars
 Drawing: Catherine Fitzpatrick
 Photo: Harry Foster (CMC S98 3516)



Mummified crocodiles

Photo: Danielle Cormier (CMC S97 10689)

tissues were preserved. The lungs, stomach, liver and intestines were placed in four canopic jars, but the heart was left in the body because it was considered the centre of intelligence. The corpse was then washed, wrapped in linen and soaked in resins and oils. This gave the skin a blackened appearance resembling pitch. The term “mummification” comes from the Arabic word *mumiyah*, which means “bitumen”, a pitch substance that was first used in the preservation process during the Late Period.

The Egyptians mummified humans as well as animals. This practice reached its height during the eleventh and twelfth centuries B.C. in Thebes, where the present-day cities of Luxor and Karnak are located. The purpose of mummification was to keep the body intact so it could be transported to a spiritual afterlife.



Everlasting Life

Left to right: Horus, wearing the Double Crown of Upper and Lower Egypt; the mummified body of Hunefer protected by Isis and Nephthys (birds); Hunefer kneeling before two cobras wrapped around the emblems of Upper and Lower Egypt; an offering table and a sacred eye; two water gods, one holding a was sceptre and the other the sign for “a million years” .

Photo: Harry Foster (CMC S98 3543)