

Name _____
Date _____

■ Introduction

In ancient Egypt, people believed that after death the soul would perish if it could not rest in its body. It was therefore very important to stop the body from decaying by making it into what we now call a mummy. The body was given to embalmers who dried it, preserved it, wrapped it, and then returned it to relatives for burial. The soul was made up of two spirits, the ba (BAH) and the ka (KAH), which the ancient Egyptians believed lived on in the body after death.

■ The ba

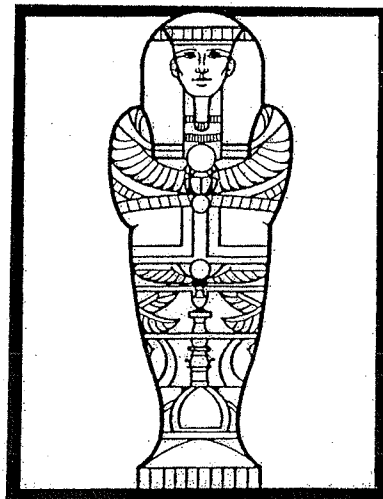
The personality of the deceased, the ba was often pictured as a human-headed bird. Judged by Osiris in the Underworld, it could go anywhere it wanted and assume any form. It could leave the body, travel to the heavens by night, and return to the body in the daytime. Therefore, the ba needed to be able to recognize its body.

■ The ka

The invisible twin of the deceased, the ka, is often shown as a pair of upraised arms. It never left the tomb and resided either in the mummy or in a statue of the deceased. The ka was the human being's life force and needed food and water to survive, just like a living person.

■ Mummiya

Mummies get their name from the Arabic word "mummiya," meaning "bitumen," a natural asphalt. This resin with which some mummies were filled turned them black over the centuries until they looked like bitumen. Medieval doctors believed that the bitumen would cure illnesses. For this reason, in the Middle Ages and even later, mummies were sent to Europe where they were ground up and swallowed as medicine.



■ Natural Mummification

In prehistoric times bodies were buried in a fetal position in a hole in the sand. If they were not destroyed by jackals or decay, the bodies were naturally mummified by the environment's heat and dryness. Later, Egyptians wanted to create mummies without putting the bodies at risk or waiting many years. Pharaohs wanted extravagant tombs, and sand pits were not what they had in mind. Early burials were notable failures. Wrapping a body up and sealing it from the dry Egyptian climate allowed the body to rot away inside the wrappings.

■ Natron

Eventually, Egyptians developed a method of drying bodies with natron, a natural salt that left a corpse more flexible and lifelike than drying with hot sand. Natron absorbs water, dissolves body fats, and is a mild antiseptic that kills destructive bacteria.

■ Preparing the body

Near a temple, in a tent called the "Beautiful House," priests laid the body on a long, narrow table. Since the Egyptians believed people's thoughts came from the heart, not the brain, the brain was considered worthless. The priest first pushed an instrument up the nostril into the brain, extracted the brain, and discarded it. The priest cleaned the mouth and filled it with sweet oil-scented linen. A priest in a mask of Anubis (the jackal god of embalming) drew a line down the left flank of the corpse. At this point a man would come in, cut an incision on the left side of the body with a flint knife, and be chased out with curses, for it was forbidden to injure an Egyptian. However, since the body was conveniently open, all of the vital organs were removed and stored in four containers called canopic jars, which were placed in



liver



intestines

the tomb with the mummy. The stoppers on the jars were carved to represent four gods called "the Sons of Horus." **Imsety**, with a human head, guarded the liver. **Qebhsenuf**, a falcon, held the intestines. **Hapy**, a baboon, kept an eye on the lungs. **Duamutef**, a jackal, guarded the stomach. Only the heart, which would be judged by Maat, was returned to the body.



lungs



stomach

■ Embalming procedures

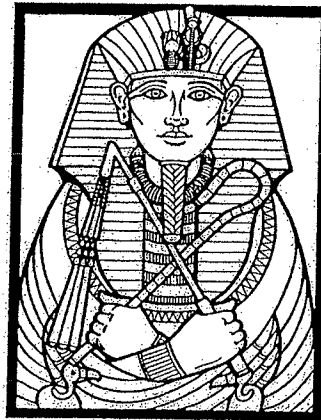
The body was washed with palm wine and spices, covered in natron, and tilted to let body fluids drain for 40 days. The "Beautiful House" was not a sweet-smelling workplace. After 40 days, molten (liquid) tree resin was poured over the body to help preserve it. To prevent it from cracking, the skin was rubbed with a mixture of cedar oil, wax, natron, and gum. To give it shape, the body was then packed with wads of linen, papyrus, sand, or even sawdust.

■ Wrapping the body

Finally, the mummy was carefully wrapped in layers of linen bandages. Hundreds of yards of linen were used to wrap a mummy. Mummies were also wrapped in shrouds, large sheets of material that were thrown over the body like a cape. The exact arrangement of the rolls and shrouds of linen varied over historic eras and are helpful in dating mummies. The first layer was usually a shroud. Then each finger and toe was wrapped separately. Next a long strip of linen beginning at the right shoulder was crisscrossed over the head. To hold the head up, a strap was then passed under the chin and knotted on top of the head. During the wrapping, the linen was constantly brushed with sticky, liquid resin. Fifteen days were set aside for the wrapping, and the whole process was accompanied by much prayer and ritual.

■ Preparations for the afterlife

Protective amulets and sometimes jewelry were placed between the layers of wrappings. It was believed that these charms had magical properties to protect the body from evil or bring good luck. The most important were the heart scarab, which meant rebirth, the djed pillar for strength, and the eye of Horus for restoring health. Many different kinds of amulets, representing plants, animals, or parts of the body, were also placed inside a mummy's wrappings. Several hundred amulets have been found on a single mummy. They were positioned on the body according to the Book of the Dead, and many were inscribed with excerpts from these sacred writings. Finally, an onion, for health, was put in the mummy's hand.



■ Masks

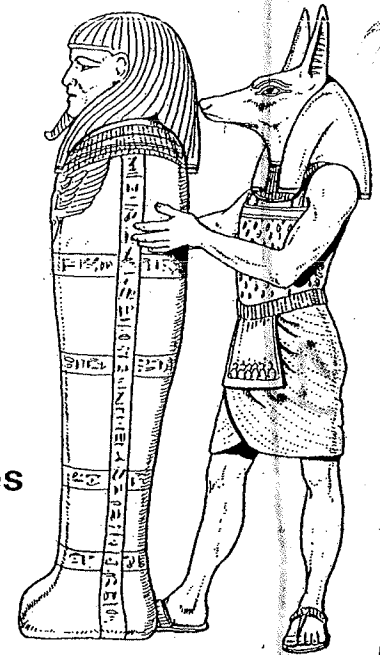
A mask did more than protect the mummy's face. It acted as a substitute head if the mummy's real head was damaged. When the dead person's spirit (ba) returned to the tomb, it could recognize the mummy by its mask.

■ Mummy cases

Embalming traditionally took 70 days. The mummy was then placed in a coffin or mummy case. The case protected the mummy from wild animals and tomb thieves and helped it during the difficult voyage to the afterlife. There was nothing sad or depressing about Egyptian mummy cases, which were painted in bright and joyful colors, with beautiful hieroglyphs and religious images, for it was believed that the dead person had left for a better world. Although wood was the ideal material for making mummy cases, many were made from cartonnage, which was cheap, light, and easy to shape and paint. Since there were very few large trees in Egypt, the best pieces of wood had to be imported. A series of wood or cartonnage coffins were nested inside the other.

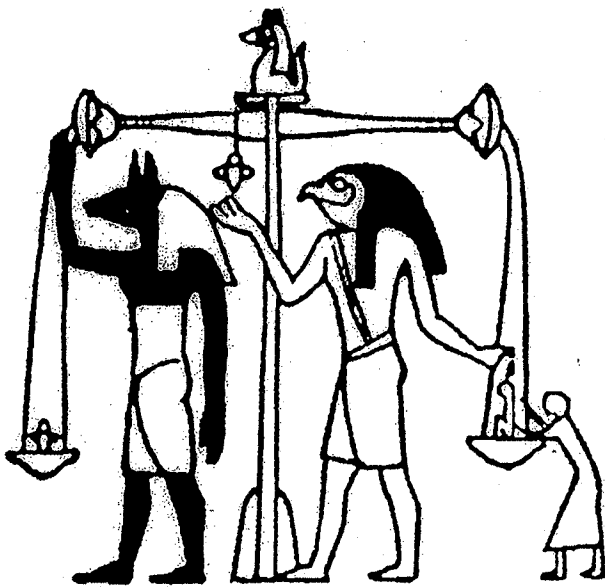
■ Sarcophagus

Coffins made of stone were reserved for Pharaohs, noblemen, or important officials. Sarcophagus means "flesh eater" in Greek, for the Greeks believed that the stone would dissolve a dead body. Sarcophagi were incredibly heavy; they had to be positioned in the tomb by gangs of workmen. During the funeral, the mummy was carried into the tomb and sealed in the sarcophagus.



7 ■ Opening of the Mouth Ceremony

The most important of all the rituals surrounding the burial process was this ceremony. It restored to the mummy all the senses and movements of the living. The mummy would be held upright while the priest, with incense burning, touched the mouth of the mummy with an implement resembling the left foreleg of an ox, and recited these words: "You live again, you revive always, you have become young again, you are young again and forever." After this rite was performed, the ba and ka could move freely. Following the burial, the deceased had only to survive one final test of truth and honor: the Weighing of the Heart.



Osiris

8 ■ Weighing of the Heart

Egyptians believed that all the good and bad deeds of a lifetime were stored in the heart. Egyptians needed to be "lighthearted"—without heavy, evil deeds weighing upon their hearts. Before entering heaven, the heart was put on a scale and weighed against the Feather of Truth, called Maat (MAH AHT). Maat was the judge. Thoth, god of wisdom and writing, recorded the decision. Anubis and Horus assisted in the ceremony. Standing nearby awaiting the outcome was the monster god Ammut (AH MUT), the "Devourer of the Dead," who would swallow any heart that did not pass the test. If the heart balanced with the Feather of Truth, the mummy would live forever and reside in the realm of Osiris.

■ Animal mummification

The ancient Egyptians mummified many animals with the same care they took for people. Favorite pets were occasionally mummified and put in the tomb with their owners to keep them company in the afterlife. But most animals were embalmed for religious reasons. Animals were thought to be representatives or spiritual messengers of the gods.

■ Learning from mummies

Through scientific study we have learned how the ancient Egyptians embalmed their dead. We have also learned how Egyptians lived, what they ate, and what diseases afflicted them. Some scientists believe that genetic analysis of mummies may one day help find a cure for modern viruses.

■ Assignment

1. Divide the 17 titled paragraphs in the essay equally among some members in round robin fashion with the noble taking #1, the administrator #2, the scribe #3, the laborer #4, and so on until all paragraphs are covered.
2. Members are to briefly list the important idea in each paragraph assigned them.
3. When all are finished, conduct a "read a round" with each member, in turn, reading a paragraph and giving its main idea. Other members should take brief notes.