

THE MYTH OF RA



Ra, the sun god, appeared from watery nothingness and created all things by speaking their names. As he named them, they appeared.



When the sun set, people believed that Ra was beginning his nightly voyage through the underworld.



He would guide the sun's boat through the land of darkness and set to burn again at dawn.



When a pharaoh died, he joined his father Ra in the sun's boat. The next pharaoh became the new son of Ra on earth.

THE MYTH OF OSIRIS



Long ago, when the gods lived on earth, Ra ruled Egypt. He was succeeded by Osiris, son of Nut, the sky goddess. Osiris ruled wisely and well.



Osiris's evil brother Set plotted to kill him by offering a chest as a gift to anyone who could fit inside it. When Osiris tried, Set's henchmen nailed him in.



The chest, now Osiris's coffin, was thrown into the Nile and swept out to sea, to a far away land where a tamarisk tree enclosed it in its trunk.



Osiris's wife, Isis, went in search of him and found the chest in a pillar which the King of that land had made from the tamarisk trunk.



She brought his body home, but the furious Set tore it into pieces which he scattered in the Nile. Isis searched the river until she had found them all.



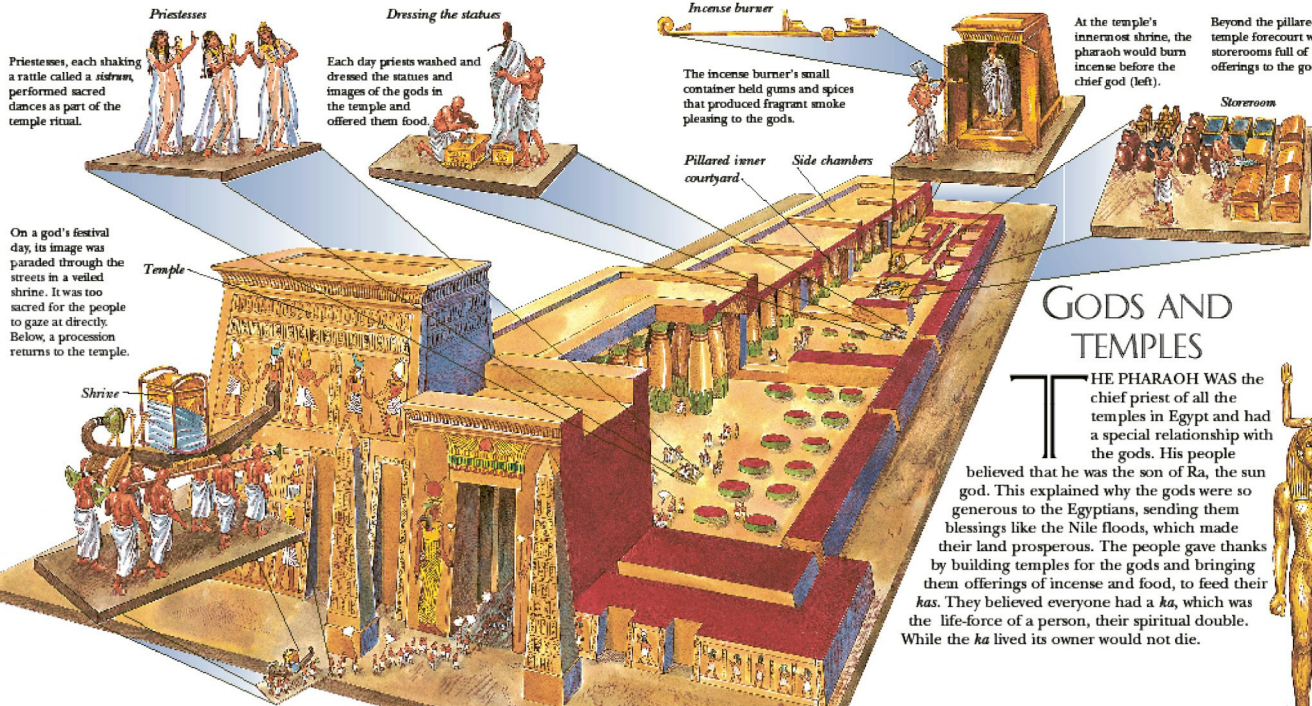
Isis put all the pieces together and, with the help of the jackal god Anubis, who bound up Osiris's body, she brought him back to life.



Ra then made Osiris king of the underworld, where he welcomed the dead whose past lives had been good. Their goodness was judged by weighing their hearts in the scales of truth. Bad hearts were heavy and were eaten by a monster who walked by the scales.



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Priestesses
Priestesses, each shaking a rattle called a *stratus*, performed sacred dances as part of the temple ritual.

Dressing the statues
Each day priests washed and dressed the statues and images of the gods in the temple and offered them food.

Incense burner

The incense burner's small container held gums and spices that produced fragrant smoke pleasing to the gods.

Pillared inner courtyard

Side chambers

Temple

Shrine

On a god's festival day, his image was paraded through the streets in a veiled shrine. It was too sacred for the people to gaze at directly. Below, a procession returns to the temple.



Storeroom

At the temple's innermost shrine, the pharaoh would burn incense before the chief god (left).

Beyond the pillared temple forecourt were storerooms full of offerings to the gods.

GODS AND TEMPLES

THE PHARAOH WAS the chief priest of all the temples in Egypt and had a special relationship with the gods. His people believed that he was the son of Ra, the sun god. This explained why the gods were so generous to the Egyptians, sending them blessings like the Nile floods, which made their land prosperous. The people gave thanks by building temples for the gods and bringing them offerings of incense and food, to feed their *kas*. They believed everyone had a *ka*, which was the life-force of a person, their spiritual double. While the *ka* lived its owner would not die.



This wooden image (above) represents a *ka*. The uplifted arms on its head are a sign of protection.

THE VALLEY OF THE KINGS

THE RICH CONTENTS of the pyramids attracted thieves. This was probably why the New Kingdom pharaohs started to hide their burials in a remote valley opposite the city of Thebes. Here, over six centuries, the pharaohs' workmen cut deep into the hillside to create the series of magnificent royal tombs that give the valley its name. Now it is one of the world's top tourist attractions – in ancient times it was a building site with work always in progress.

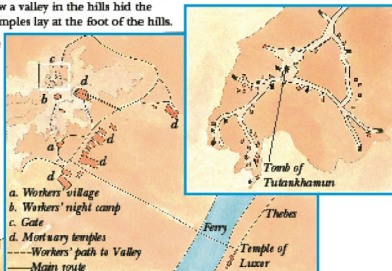
Vizier inspection

The vizier would visit the tombs regularly to inspect progress. He was greeted by the foremen who hoped that he would not find fault with their work.

All supplies, even water, had to be brought to the valley on donkeys (right).

The map below shows how a valley in the hills hid the tombs. Their mortuary temples lay at the foot of the hills.

Coppersmiths (below) were constantly at work casting new blades for the masons' chisels and resharpening blunt ones.



KEEPING RECORDS



To keep track of the work and control costs, scribes made notes of all work done and equipment used.



Notes were made on flakes of stone, but later the scribe would write an official report on papyrus paper.



Papyrus was a reed that was plentiful in the Nile marshes. To make paper, young trashy cut stems were needed.



First the tough outer skin of the stem was peeled away. Then the soft inner pith was cut into long thin strips.



The strips were laid side by side and covered with more of the same. They were pounded together to form a sheet.

DESIGNING THE TOMB



As soon as a pharaoh came to the throne he began to plan his tomb. He would order his vizier to organize it.



The vizier consulted a royal architect and they studied plans showing where existing tombs lay. They had to avoid cutting into these.



The architect travelled to the valley to check possible sites. The journey across the Nile, into the desert and up a track into the hills would have been hot and tiring. The valley was hidden from view by rocks that almost met, forming a narrow entrance that was always guarded.



One of the builder's foremen would make the architect in the valley to offer his opinion on a likely site. A scribe noted down the foreman's advice.



Once the place had been selected, work could begin. First, however, a foundation ceremony was held at the site.



As part of the foundation ceremony, ritual objects were buried in a shallow pit in front of the tomb entrance. Archaeologists have found several of these pits. The metal tools and vessels above were discovered in a foundation pit in front of the tomb of Pharaoh Amenhotep II, of the 18th century BC.

Stone carver

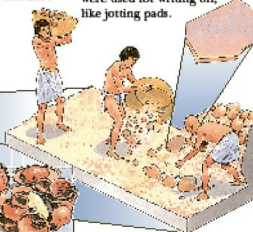


A stone carver would carve out a traditional scene to go over the tomb's entrance. It showed two pictures of the pharaoh worshipping the sun-disk. Below is a picture of the completed scene.



Tomb entrance

Flat flakes of stone (right) were used for writing on, like jotting pads.



Limestone rubble from the hillside was dumped outside the tomb. Scribes looked through it for bits on which to make their notes (above).

THE VILLAGERS' FOOD



The basic diet of all but the wealthiest ancient Egyptians was made up of bread, beans, fruit and vegetables, with some fish and very little meat. As it was impossible to grow food on the land around the village, the villagers relied on provisions to be sent to them from the pharaoh's storehouses. These supplies were their wages, as cattle were not yet used.



Fields provided extra living space. Women chatted and did their spinning there. Children played with their toys or ran from roof to roof.



When the weekend came, the children dashed down to the village gate to greet their fathers who had been away all week, working in the valley.



For relaxation after a hard week, a draughts match was a favourite pastime. The Egyptians played several other board games whose rules are now unknown.



In the game called 'Senpet', the board was shaped like a coiled snake. Players threw coloured balls to move the lion-shaped playing pieces.



The men's eight-day working week (an Egyptian week had ten days) was often interrupted by one of the sixty or more festivals throughout the year.



There were festivals at the full moon, the beginning of spring, harvest time and at the river's flood. The villagers also joined in the 24-day festival at Thebes in honour of the god Amun.



The village had its own festival in honour of a local pharaoh called Amenophis I, who was said to have founded the village and protected it.

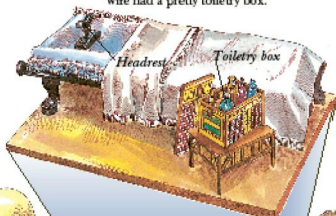


Beer was brewed by steeping barley dough in sweetened water and straining the fermented liquid into jars.

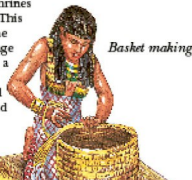
A WORKER'S HOUSE

INSIDE THE WALL, the villagers' houses were crammed together, each joined to its neighbour, along both sides of the street. They were narrow and dark, with one room leading straight to the next, but the darkness was welcome after the fierce Egyptian sun. There was not much furniture, just stools, low tables on which meals were served and chests and jars used for storage.

The owner of a house like the one below would have been well off. He had a bed (many people slept on mats) and his wife had a pretty toiletary box.



Every house in the village had shrines to the gods. This home's shrine holds an image of Bes (left), a kindly god who guarded the home and the family.



Basket making

Women often took their basket making work onto the roof. Baskets were made from rushes which were wound in a coil, each row overstretched to fasten it to the previous one.

PREPARING FOOD



Fire was started with a bow drill, some wood perforated with holes and a stick. The drill rotated the stick in a hole, causing friction and sparks.



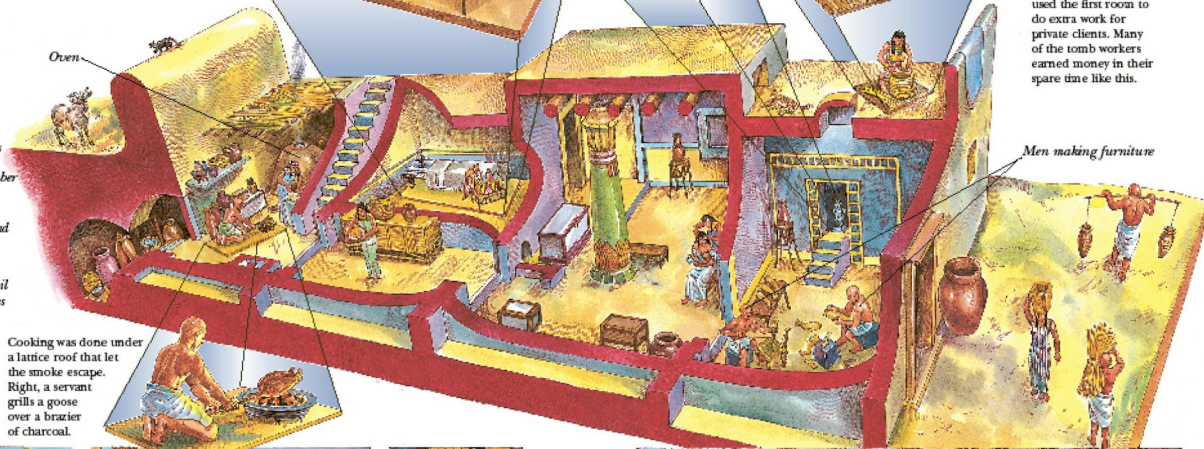
The oven had a door at the bottom for raking the fire and opening at the top, where the cooked food was taken out.



The ancient Egyptians made many loaves and cakes. These men are cooking pancakes on a large flat stone over a fire.



This goatman is churning goats' milk by swinging it to and fro in two skin bags as he walks along.



Cooking was done under a lattice roof that let the smoke escape. Right, a serrant grills a goose over a brazier of charcoal.

Men making furniture



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In a small room opening from the first chamber (below) Carter found hundreds of jumbled up objects. Originally food, oil, wine and ointments had been stored here, but furniture had been included because of lack of space elsewhere. This room's original contents included chairs, stools, boxes, bedsteads, 40 wine jars, 35 alabaster oil jars and 116 baskets of fruit.

When the four carved and gilded shrines had been set up around the sarcophagus in the burial chamber (right) there was almost no room left.

The first shrine, made of gilded and inlaid cedarwood.

Burial chamber—

The second shrine, draped with a sequined linen pall.

The third shrine, carved with sacred texts.

The fourth shrine, covered in carvings of the gods.

The room Carter named the treasury was guarded by the figure of a crouching jackal, representing the god Anubis.

Treasury Model boat

The treasury held objects of religious use: the canopic shrine, small shrines holding figures of Tutankhamun as a god, chests and caskets, *shabti*s and model boats.

This richly decorated shrine of gilded wood held Tutankhamun's embalmed internal organs in a canopic chest of alabaster.

The 18 model boats in the treasury were symbols of voyaging to the next world and of the pharaoh's sacred journey in the Sun's boat.

Wooden statues of Tutankhamun

The first room was an antechamber stocked with gilded couches, four chariots and all manner of chests and boxes for linen.

Antechamber

Couches

Entrance to burial chamber

Two life-sized wooden statues of Tutankhamun guarded the entrance to the burial chamber. Their flesh was resin-painted and their clothes gilded. One statue represented the king and the other his ka.

TUTANKHAMUN'S TOMB

WHEN HOWARD CARTER and Lord Carnarvon dug their way into Tutankhamun's tomb they were dazzled by the riches it held. Although it had been robbed in ancient times, the thieves had only taken things that they could carry easily. The burial chamber was untouched. Its gilded shrines still enclosed the massive sarcophagus in which the pharaoh lay, in an innermost coffin of solid gold weighing 110.4 kg. Magnificent jewellery adorned the mummy, which wore a headpiece of heavy beaten gold, inlaid with lapis lazuli. The storerooms held gilded thrones, furniture and splendid caskets of ivory and wood, painted with scenes or inlaid with gold and with blue faience. There were lamps, precious vessels and toilet objects, all of exquisite workmanship. Yet these were the grave goods of a young and unimportant pharaoh, hastily buried in a makeshift tomb with little storage space. Imagine the wealth that once lay piled in the great royal tombs!

As porters carried Tutankhamun's funeral goods into his tomb (above), a superintendent showed where they must be put. Stocking this tomb was an awkward job as there was little space for all the things a pharaoh needed. In a normal New Kingdom royal burial there would have been several pillared halls and storerooms to fill.