

Death rituals in ancient egypt



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

For my Gordon Rule Paper I have decided to write about the Egyptians since I have always found them fascinating. The primary topic I will be discussing would be the way in which the ancient Egyptians would view, and considered death, due to how immensely different we as Americans view death today.

The vast majority of Americans fear death more than anything else. We go to great lengths to ensure our health, safety, and survival. To us there is nothing worse than death, whereas to every Egyptian death was seen as a desirable transformation, 'the passage of the true eternal life'. Death was never considered a tragedy, or a loss, but a welcome transition into the afterlife. Because death was of such an importance; it was essential that great care be taken for a transition to immortality. This is a huge reason that the Pharaoh's contents of the tomb were of such great importance, and so carefully selected. Egyptians prioritized the importance of rituals, customs, and beliefs; as well as architecture can be seen clearly in the discovery of the tomb of King Tutankhamen, or as most people know him King Tut.

The architecture that went into every Pharaoh's tomb was extraordinarily complex. Each one was greatly different in terms of the tombs layout, size, and decorations. The tombs structure and layout almost always had to, somehow, show the formation, and projection of the solar system. Miral decorations in the tomb don't represent the Pharaoh's everyday life, but instead that of their afterlife, and the challenges the Pharaoh has to face in order to reach the Kingdom of the Dead, land of the afterlife.

These tombs were grand, and usually consisted of a number of rooms, and courtyards. Tomb walls were usually stoned lined of limestone columns. This type of tomb is built below the ground, as usually the chapel was built on the surface and the burial areas below.

The Nile area was rocky, and featured many cliffs, so these were perfect locations for the creating of the tombs directly in the hillside. The most common chapel consisted of a door which lead into a transverse hall, behind which was a corridor that ran straight to the face of the cliff. Over time rock tombs became more elaborate, more decorative, and narrower as they now ran directly into the cliff-face, these tombs were the most impressing of all the tombs in Egypt, as they featured splendid sights, often with pillars and large stairways. Rock cut chapels were more commonly used by Pharaohs, and those of the richer society, as the rocky regions of Egypt were best suited for the building of these tombs. Tombs contained wall decorations, which dealt with the Afterlife, and the path that the Pharaoh will have too take to reach the kingdom of Orrises. A royal tomb could be done within a few months for a simple tomb, or for a more larger, and complex tomb, it could take from six to ten years.

Decorations varied for each Pharaoh. From elaborate paintings, to imitations of papyrus. All texts painted on walls were quoted from ' the great magical religion anthologies of the time such as the Book of the Dead and the Book of the Earth' (Guide to the Valley of The Kings page26, 1996). These magical and religious texts were drawn on the walls to inform the deceased, and for the deceased to use as a invaluable tool for them to make sure that they had enough knowledge of magical nature for them to use during the Afterlife.

The New Kingdom royal tombs featured many different ceilings and decorations, which included star maps, which illustrated the rising of the sun. Placing a burial underneath a holy symbol was considered of great importance for the resurrection of the body. Texts and drawings on tomb walls contained various colors; each color that was used depicts Egyptian rituals. Colors such as White represents Silver, Black represented death and eternal preservation and Red represents fire and blood. As these colors and depictions lead up to the star the life, the deceased is painted, including all of the deceased families life.

Today, in retrospect, we primarily bury our loved ones in accordance with their wishes, or in a graveyard next to other deceased loved ones. We bury them six feet under-ground, (typically) but only because that is the minimal depth a decaying corpse can be buried without having any effect on the world under-which it was buried. Typically it takes about seven days from the time we die until we are laid to rest. That allows us plenty of time to choose a good grave sight, dig it up, lay the dead down, say some kind words, and fill the hole again. Ancient Egyptians, on the other hand, took considerably longer. Before a body was buried the process of embalming took place for about seventy days. Historian Herodotus' tells of three levels of mumification that depended upon the quantity of wealth the deceased had. The very most expensive procedure was the embalming which resembled the god Osiris. The ritual took place, usually, within seventy days. A contract was drawn up between the embalmers, and the deceased family, which specifies the amount of time the embalming procedure will take place. The body would then placed on a wooden table and purified by washing the body

in a solution of neutron. The brains were removed from the nasal cavity. The abdomen would then be cut, and all the organs removed and then purified with aromas. Once the organs were removed they were placed into jars and placed inside the tomb. The body is then stuffed with straw, sawdust, mud or linen; this assists in retaining the deceased bodie's shape, and is also wrapped with linen, and/or bandages.

Egyptian rituals and beliefs also played a critically important part in the lead of the deceased to the tomb . The ritual of the burial, and its tombs content, takes place outside the tomb. The transport of the body to the tomb took form of a ritual procession that normally began on the East side of the Nile River; After crossing the river, to the west, the body was placed on a sledge, and drawn by oxen to the tomb.

Close to the mummy stood two women who would normally impersonate the diving mourners Isis, and Nephthys, who represented the wife and sister of the god Osiris, followed by mourners of the deceased. The last mourner in the procession burnt incense and sprinkled milk at the procession as they would continue on their way to the tomb. Ritual dancers, known as Mu, and a priest, who honors the deceased now greet the procession. The ancient ritual of the “ opening of the mouth” now takes place; this is the most significant part of the burial traditions, as the purpose of this ceremony is to restore the mummy and their power of speech, sight and hearing.

The body has now completed the first part of Egyptian rituals. When the deceased approaches the Entrance of the tomb a priest who impersonates the god Anubis stands the body in an upright position. The priest now

touches the mouth of the deceased with ritual instruments, which now restores their senses. The next stage is the offering of clothes, ointments and offerings of food so the deceased can take them into the Afterlife. The mummy is now ready to be placed into it's burial chamber, after the door is sealed all footprints around the tomb is swept away and the last rites are read.

The stages leading up to the burial of the deceased was an integral part of the Egyptians beliefs and rituals, as the Egyptians regarded the dead as being very much alive, living in their tombs like they had previously lived in their homes. This link between the house and the tomb was very important, the tombs chapel was commonly referred to ' the house of eternity'. Outside the chapel it was common to see lushes gardens, and tombs surrounding as Cemeteries were planned to look like miniature cities like the one at Giza.

All the above beliefs and rituals were clearly uncovered in November 1922 by British archaeologist Howard Carter when he discovered the intact tomb of King Tutankhamen. Analysis of Tutankhamen's mummy reveals that he was approximately eighteen years old when he died. The Kings life is still a mystery to this day as historians such as Carter believes that it's almost impossible to say whether the King was a victim of illness, accident, assassination or was physically frail like his previous heirs when he passed away. Historians identified the month of his death to be that of January by analyzing the types of fruit and flowers such as the cornflower which were buried with him. The cornflower usually reaches maturity in March, and from these findings it is believed that ' Amenophis III last son died some time in

January 1343' (Tutankhamen and the Discovery of the Tomb page 158, 1972).

Tutankhamen's tomb features a simple design, which is typical of the Eighteenth Dynasty. The tomb features starts, corridors, and chambers. The king tomb has a number of rooms such as the Annexe, Antechamber, Burial Chamber and the treasury and all of these rooms featured significant decorations. King Tutankhamen's tomb was so unique as the treasures inside the tomb lay undisturbed to robbers, and during excavation Carter recovered over three thousand five hundred articles such as grand elegant furniture, statues, jewelery, and shrines that were placed in his tomb to help him through to the Afterlife.

The kings death like other Pharaohs was a grand affair, and was mourned by all of Egypt . Generally after a Pharaohs death there was a three-month interval between his death and his burial. During this time the complex ritual of embalming took place. The embalming of a Pharaoh was known as the ' House of Vigor' (Tutankhamen: Life and Death of a Pharaoh page 163, 1965) in which the Pharaohs body was purified and all impurities were removed. After the final phase of the mummification ritual takes place, the Pharaoh now passes into eternity.

When King Tutankhamen's body was bandaged, each layer contained a treasure such as golden objects. When the Kings body was unwrapped over 143 treasures were found such as pendants, amulets and golden finger stalls. Like the treasures wrapped in between the bandages the tomb itself was flowing with treasures, ' Nearly everything was made of precious

material, and gold...this covered a wide assortment of articles necessary to ensure eternity for the dead' (Tutankhamen and the Discovery of the Tomb page 70, 1972). All of the Kings rooms inside the tomb featured significant decorations.

The Antechamber held the Tuta royal throne, which is one of the best known objects, found inside the tomb. This throne engaged wood with sheets of gold and its back is covered with a scene of the Pharaoh and his wife Ankhesenamun.

The burial chamber features the first wooden coffin and the Kings mummy. The scenes painted on walls show King Tutankhamen with his Kai at the ceremony of the ' opening of the mouth' (The Discovery of the Tomb Tutankhamen page 37, 1977) and his successor Ay. His burial bay the ' red quartzite sarcophagus' (The Discovery of the Tomb Tutankhamen page 39, 1977) coffin had five coffins, the first to the third were anthropoid wooden coffins, the forth was golden and the fifth was his mummy. The King Tutankhamen's burial was the same as any Pharaoh and followed all rituals and beliefs as well as mummification principles. The only difference was that the King was so young at the time of his death and that till this day no other tomb has been uncovered that all items inside the tomb are still intact.

It can be seen that burial and death in general in Egypt was of enormous importance within the Egyptian society especially when it was concerning someone of higher status like that of a Pharaoh. Egyptians believed in the Afterlife and this played an important part in reinforcing the rituals and beliefs of death in Egyptian society as death was not believed to be the end

but the beginning of ones life. This is why rituals and beliefs as well as architecture and decorations of tombs were emphasized and carried out in the light of ones death. When an ancient Egyptian died, he was not buried into the ground, mourned and then forgotten, as people are today. Nor was his grave simply visited at certain times and some token words spoken over it, so that once again he is forgotten until next visit, like so many of us do. Maybe its the way we as people have evolved to cope with the pain of loosing a loved one. We as a nation do not believe that death is a good thing in any way, and we are taught from birth to fear it and flee it for as long as we possibly can. I for one do not fear death. Not that I look upon it as a good thing like Egyptians, just as a necessary thing that all of us must have happen.