

Egypt

Ancient Egyptian Beliefs



Introduction to Ancient Egypt

Ancient Egyptian Culture

Daily Life in Ancient Egypt

Ancient Egyptian Beliefs

Ancient Egyptian Pharaohs

Thematic Icons



Economics



Geography



Historical concepts



Government

Icons



Flash activity (these activities are not editable)



Teacher notes included in the Notes page

For more instructions, see the *User Guide*.

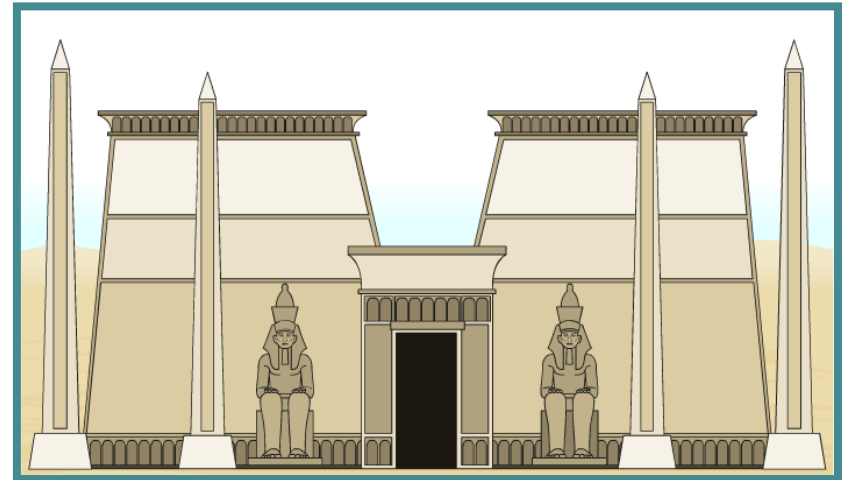


Temples were an important part of Ancient Egyptian culture and played a large role in the Egyptian way of life.

There were two different types of temple:

Mortuary temples were built to show respect for pharaohs. Pharaohs wanted to be remembered after their death.

Cultus temples were built for gods and goddesses. Each one was built for a specific god or goddess.



Can you name any Ancient Egyptian gods or goddesses?



Gods and goddesses





Temples and their wealth



Temples held a lot of social and political **power** in Ancient Egyptian life. For example, they often owned farmland so that they could produce their own food.

When the pharaoh's armies brought back spoils of war, such as gold and prisoners, temples were given a **share** of these goods.

In peacetime, the pharaoh might choose to give extra money or land to a temple.



Why might the pharaoh have wanted to give gifts to a temple?





Since temples were so important, priests and priestesses had a **high status** in Egyptian society.

Temples were seen as homes of the gods. They had an **inner sanctuary** where a statue of the god of the temple was kept. Only priests were allowed to see it.

Priests had to:

- clean the statue each morning
- offer it meals throughout the day
- make sure that the god did not become angry and leave the temple.

What other jobs might people working in temples have done?



The creation story





The Rebel Pharaoh



Akhenaten is famous because he tried to introduce **monotheism** (worshiping one god) to Egypt.

He was born Amenhotep IV, but he changed his name to Akhenaten to honor the god **Aten**: the sun disk.

He moved the capital city from Thebes to **Amarna** and told people to stop worshiping any other gods except Aten.

This was unpopular with many Egyptians. They feared that abandoning the old gods would have serious consequences.



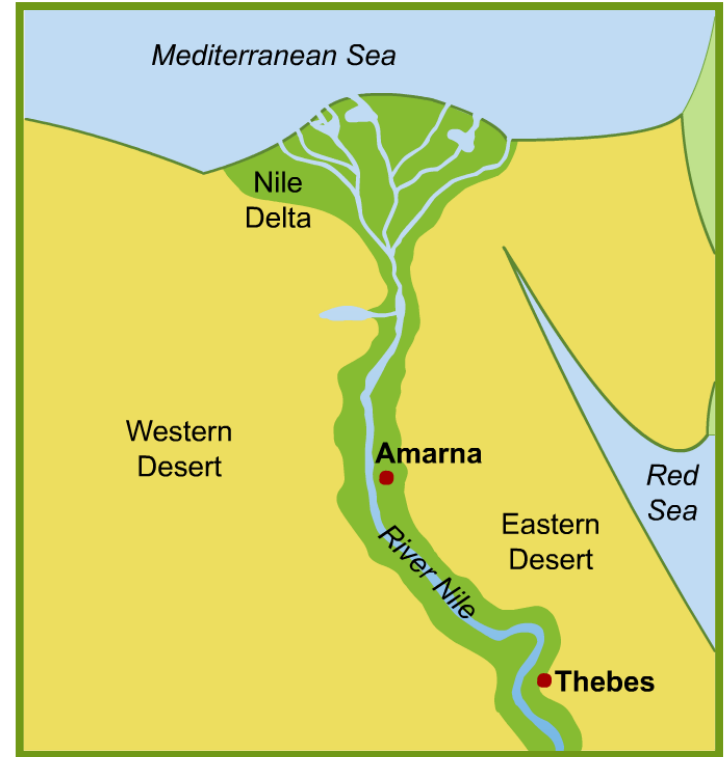


The Amarna period



Akhenaten's reign lasted 17 years, and is known as the **Amarna period**.

However, Egyptians missed the old gods and after Akhenaten's death in around 1336 BC, his well-known son **Tutankhamun** moved the capital back to Thebes.



People quickly went back to worshiping their old **pantheon**. Later pharaohs tried to erase Akhenaten from history by destroying his temples and carving over his name in stone.

Why might they have done this?

For the Ancient Egyptians, their religious beliefs and what they knew about the body were connected.

They believed the body was made up of a series of channels, and that when one of these became blocked, it caused illness. This is known as the **Channel Theory**.

However, Egyptians still thought that diseases were ultimately caused by the gods. Many of their treatments included **spells and amulets** to ask the gods to heal them.



To Ancient Egyptians, death was not the end. They believed that it was possible to live on in the **afterlife**.

When someone died, people buried clothes, furniture and gold with the dead person so that they were well prepared for the afterlife. These things are known as **grave goods**.



Rich Egyptians also built stone **tombs** for themselves and their families. They were sealed so that thieves could not break in and steal the valuable grave goods.





When nineteenth-century grave robbers looted Ancient Egyptian tombs, they found rolls of papyrus writings buried with the mummies. Although they are not a single book, these writings became known collectively as the **Book of the Dead**.

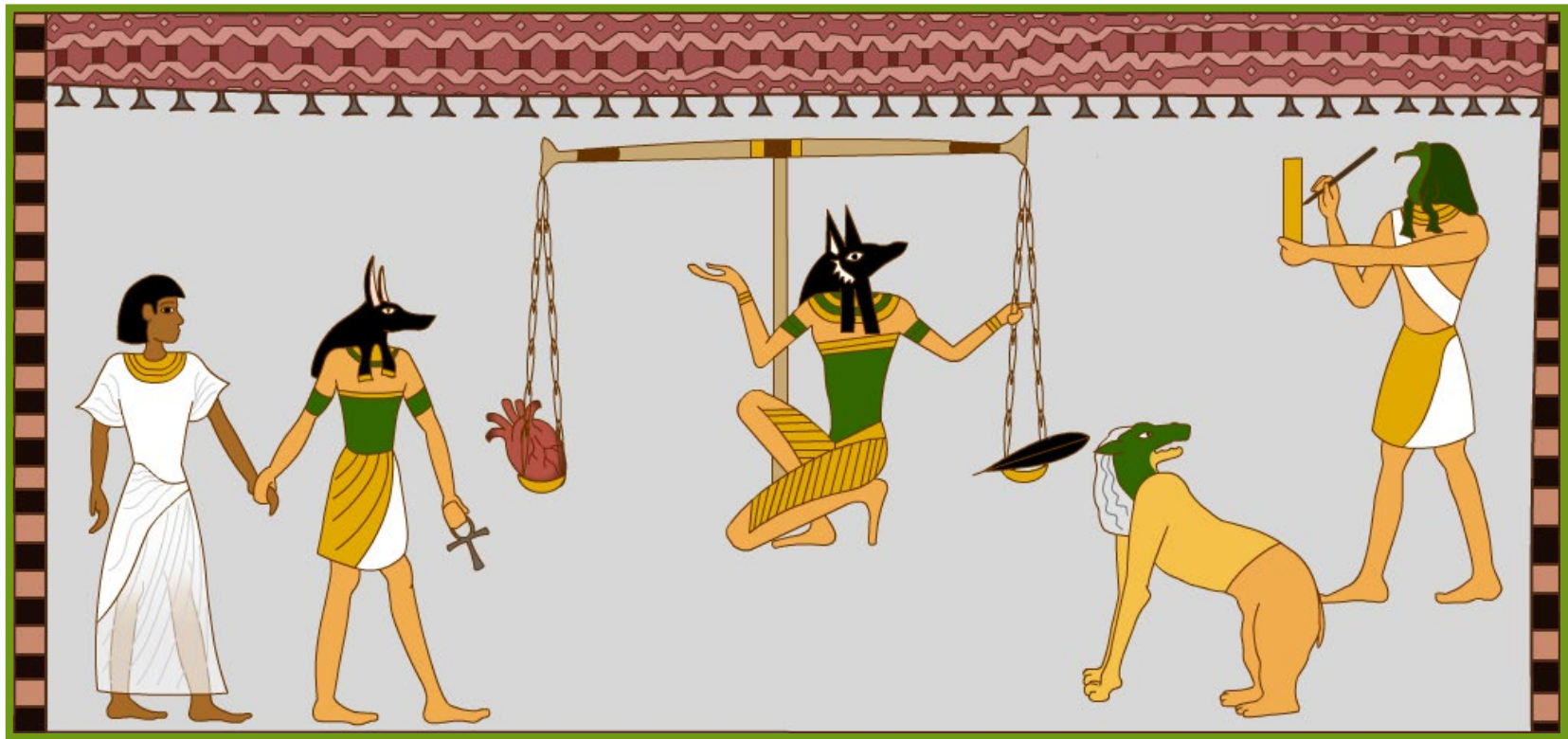
Why do you think grave robbers called the scrolls the Book of the Dead?



The Book of the Dead was first translated in 1846. It contains spells, hymns and instructions to guide the dead person through the **Tuat** (the underworld).



One of the most important parts of the Book of the Dead details the weighing of a person's heart against the **feather of Ma'at**, which represented truth and purity.



Why do you think this was important?

The Egyptians believed that the heart was the **center of knowledge** within the body. If it was lighter than the feather of Ma'at, the dead person had led a good life.

However, if the heart was heavy with bad deeds, the demon **Ammit** would eat it. Without their heart, the dead person could never reach the afterlife.

Anubis



Ammit

Ancient Egyptians believed that a person's body had to be preserved so that they could use it in the afterlife.

They achieved this by a process called **mummification**.

- Internal organs were removed and the lungs, liver, stomach and intestines were preserved in **canopic jars**.
- The body was washed and covered in **natron**, a natural mineral salt, for 40 days to dry it out.
- Once dehydrated, the body was washed again and coated in oil or **resin** to protect it from bacteria and insects.



The body was now ready to be bandaged.

Bandaging the body



Once the mummification process was complete, the body was put on an **ox-drawn cart** and collected for the funeral.

Funeral processions for wealthy Egyptians were elaborate events, to show off their high status. They involved dancers, musicians, priests and mourners.

Two female family members or priestesses were chosen to be the **chief mourners**. They stood at the head and foot of the coffin, representing the goddesses Isis and Nephthys.

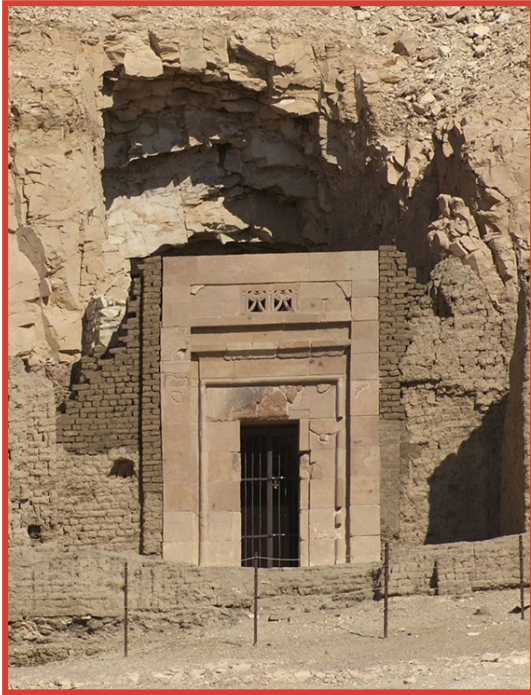
Mourners wore blue. They would wail, cry, wring their hands and smear themselves with dust to lament the death.



The Opening of the Mouth

The funeral procession would cross to the west bank of the Nile, where burials took place, and stop in front of the tomb.

The sarcophagus was raised upright so that priests could perform the **Opening of the Mouth** ceremony.



This was a ritual that involved touching the eyes and mouth of the mummy with special tools. Ancient Egyptians believed that this would allow the dead person to breathe, eat and see in the **afterlife**.

Final prayers and spells were recited, and then the mummy and its sarcophagus were sealed inside the tomb.



Keywords

