

A SHORT BUT INTENSE HISTORY OF ANCIENT EGYPT

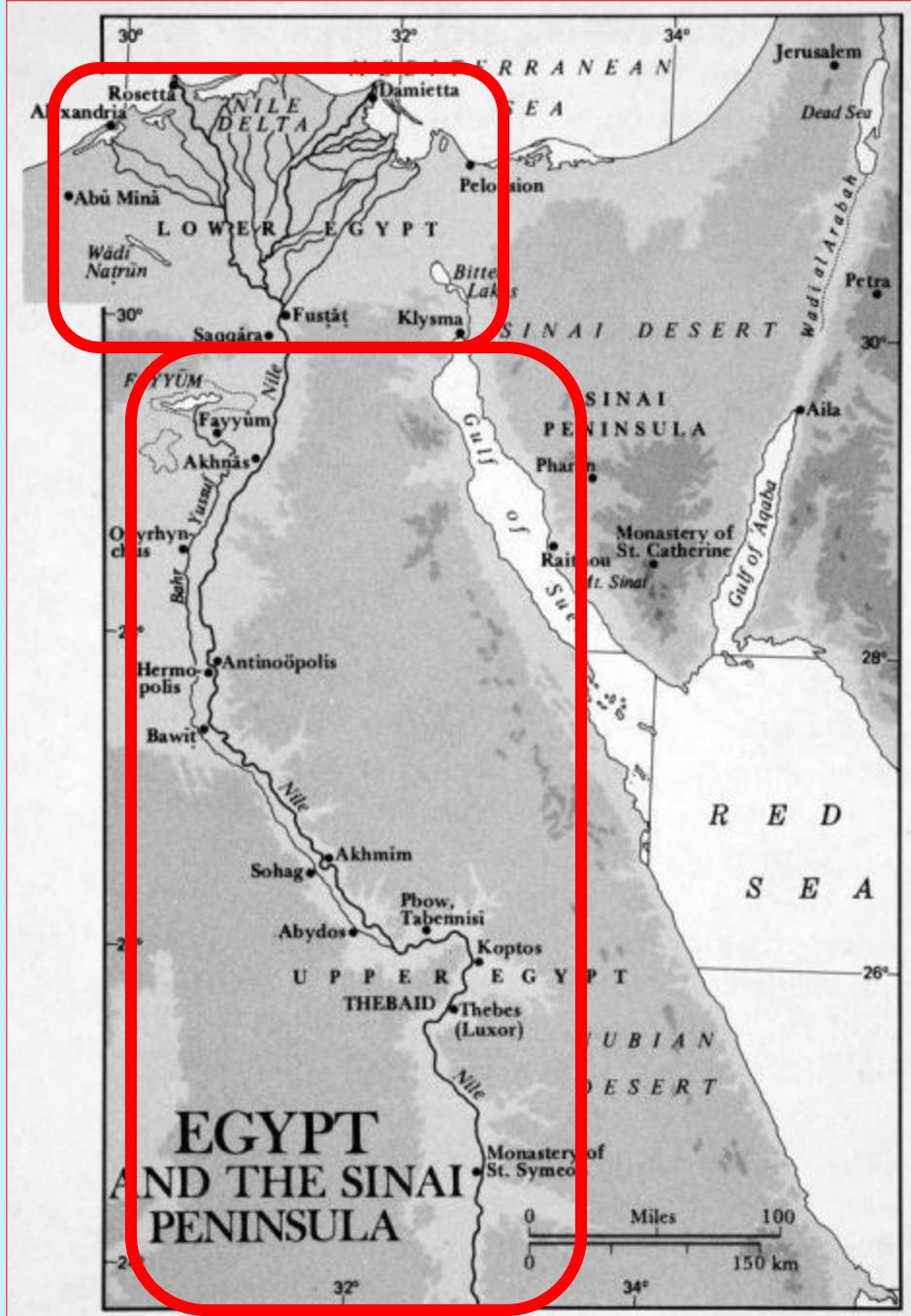
AND SOME LATER INTERPRETATIONS

IN FOUR 90-MINUTE MEETINGS

(+ maybe a visit to the Peabody)

October 24, 2013

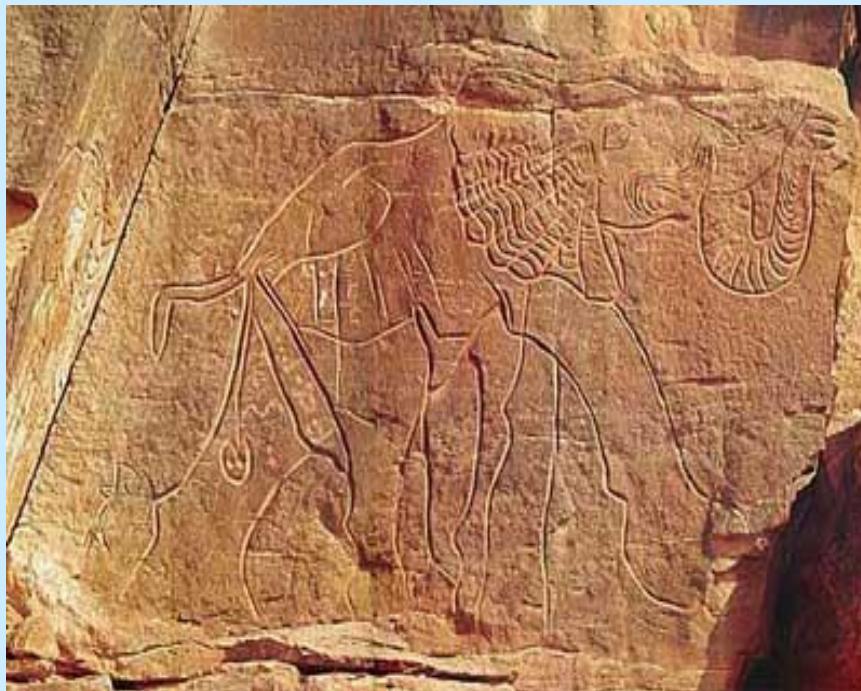
Review and clarifications



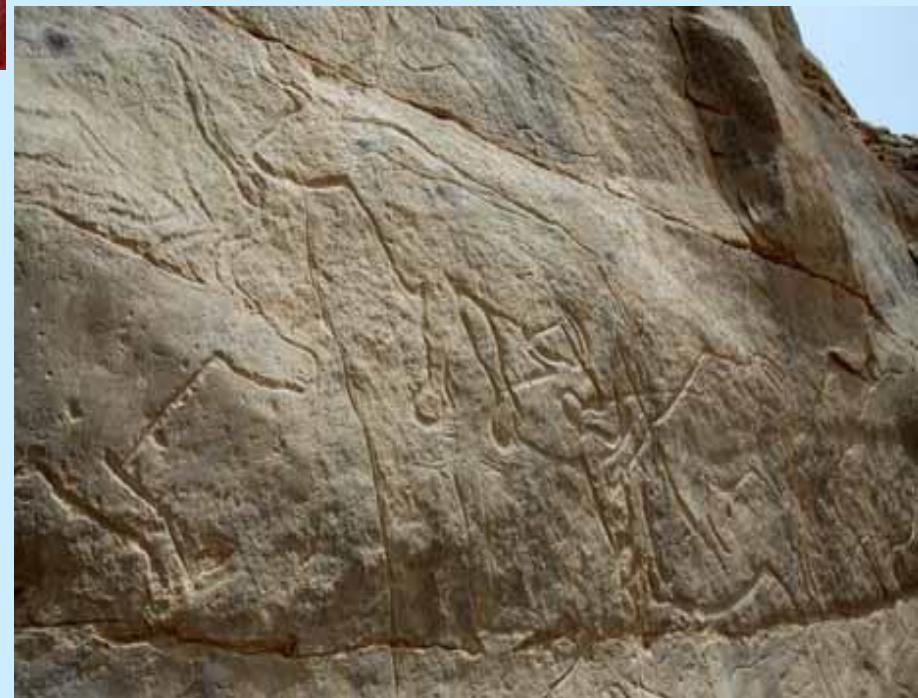
Lower Egypt

“Black land” = Nile Valley
“Red land” = desert

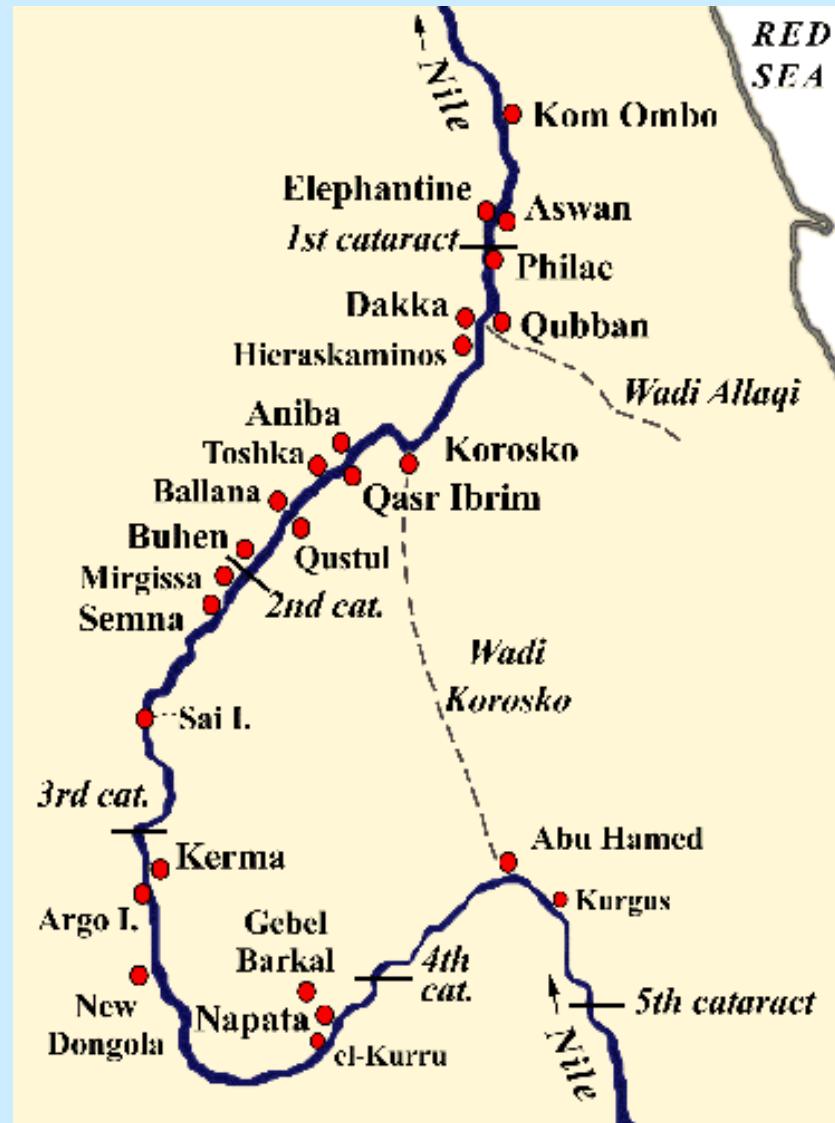
Upper Egypt



Oldest carving in Egypt, as old as 12000 years



The cataracts



2d cataract (1880 photograph)



Key pre-dynastic moments

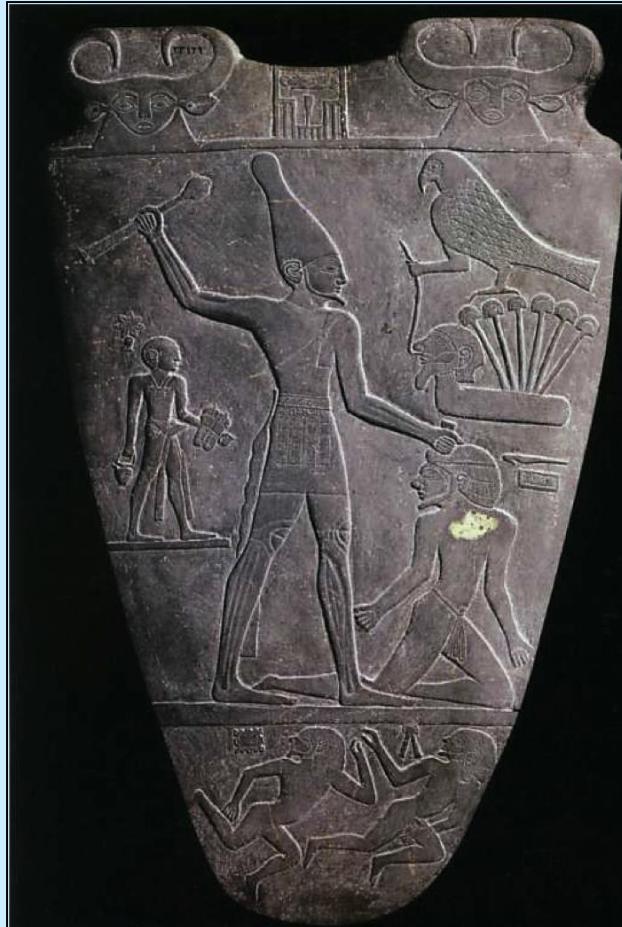
- Nile Valley population immigration, competition for scarce resources
- Limited burials in relatively elaborate tombs with wood coffins
- Indications of wrapping corpses in strips of linen
- Rhythms of nature: central to theology
- Nile flooding: central to Egyptian well-being

Narmer

Traditionally viewed as having led the south to conquer the north

NARMER PALETTE

Front



Back



Excavated at Hierakonopolis

Period (dynasties sometimes mushy)	Noteworthy events
Pre-dynastic (roughly 5000-3000 BCE, with rise and fall of several Nile cultures; includes “dynasty 0”)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Population shift from desert to Nile Evolution of agriculture, pottery, agriculture, herding, boats, trade, well-digging, social hierarchy, control of territory up and down the Nile Origin of hieroglyphs
Early Dynastic (3200/2950-2575; dynasties 1-2)	Main cemetery established at Saqqara (dynasty 2)
Old Kingdom (ca, 2575-2125; dynasties 3-6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dynasty 3: 1st (Step) pyramid at Saqqara (Djoser) Dynasty 4: Meidum, Bent, Red pyramids (Sneferu); Giza pyramids (Khufu, Khafra, Menkaura)
1 st intermediate period (c. 2125-2010; dynasties 7-10)	Egypt divided; dynasties 9-11
Middle Kingdom (2010-1630; dynasties 11-13)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Egypt reunited; Thebes becomes capital Flourishing of literature Hatshepsut (female ruler; creator of label “pharaoh”)
2 nd intermediate period (ca. 1630-1539; dynasties 14-17)	Hyksos (“rulers from foreign lands,” based in Delta)
New Kingdom (ca. 1539-1069; dynasties 18-20)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Egypt reunited Akhenaten (r. 1353-1336) attempts to change Egyptian religion Tutankhamen (son of Akhenaten) Book of the Dead Ramesses II (r. 1279-1212)
3 rd intermediate period (ca, 1069-664; dynasties 21-25)	Egypt fragmented, ruled by many different groups, including Nubian period of about a century
Late period (ca. 664-332; dynasties 26-31)	Egypt sort of reunited; variety of rulers, including Persian kings as pharaohs from afar (dynasty 27)
Ptolemaic (Macedonian-Greek) period (332-30)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alexander the Great conquers Egypt His lead general (Ptolemy) begins final ruling family Manetho creates dynasty approach Cleopatra VII (59-30): last pharaoh

NY Times, Oct. 22, 2013

- In general in the Levant and Egypt, civilizations had significant declines or collapses around 1250-1100 BCE.
- Unproven causal theories have included plague, war and earthquakes.
- New study of pollen in Sea of Galilee sediments indicates major drought somewhere in this period.
- Similar but less precise results have come from studies in Cyprus, Anatolia, Syria and the Nile Delta.
- The first recorded hint of trouble was a mid-13th century letter from a Hittite queen to Ramses II, saying, “I have no grain in my lands.”

Ancient Egyptian psychology

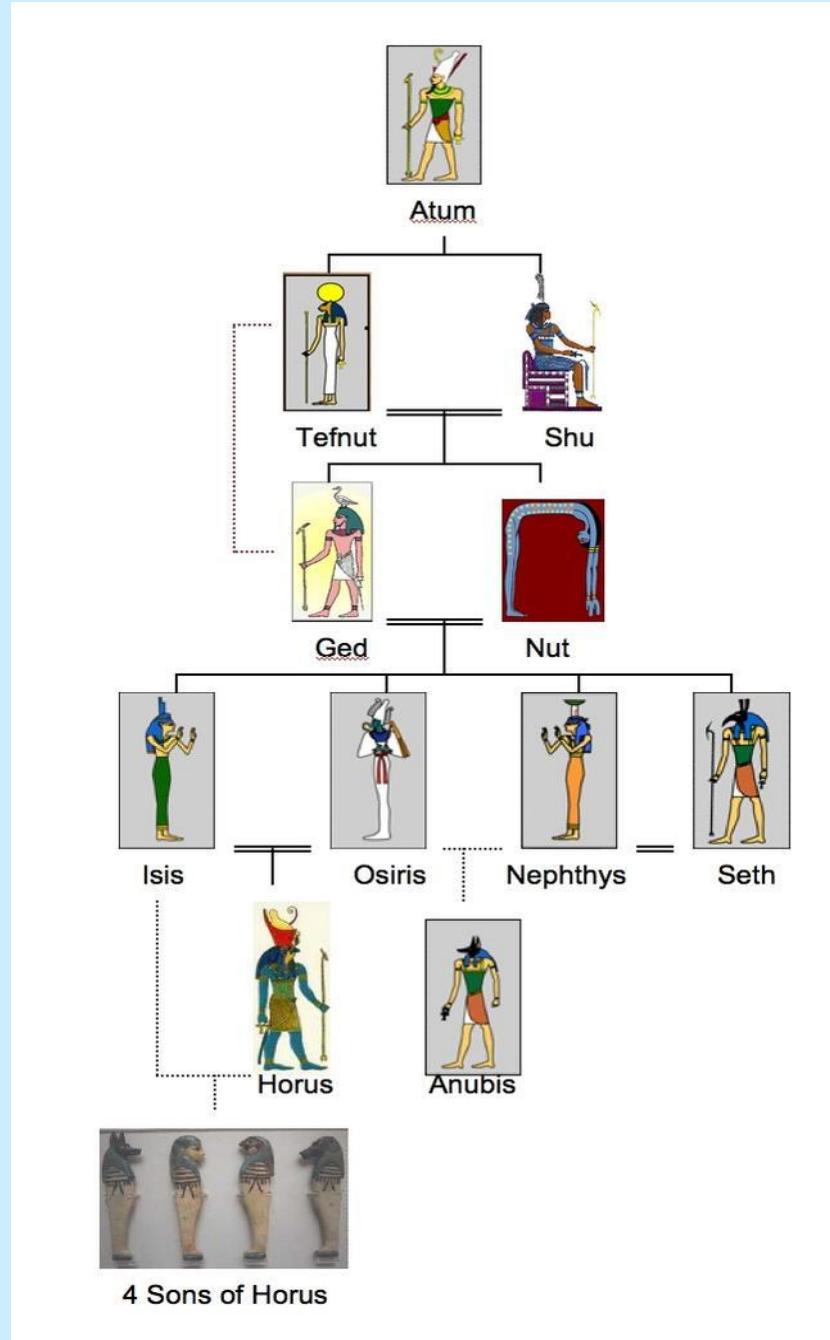
- No differentiation between real-ideal, history-ceremony, event-ritual, divine-worldly, gods-nature
- Immersion in the concrete, tangible, sensual
- Filtering of “truth” through perceptions of life around them
- Fear of uncertainty, chaos, novelty
- Embrace of seemingly contradictory “facts”

Power of religion, worship

- Magical power existed in images, words, names, spells.
- Temples, rituals, funerals, festivals were major economic forces.
- Dreams foreshadowed life events or were communications with the gods.

Creation, the divine

- Creation myths were often steeped in divine sexuality.
- Gods were terrifying, but they also listened (hearing stelae).
- Atum created the world from a mound (benben) in watery chaos (Nun).
- Nut (sky) and Geb (earth) were siblings who begot Isis-Nephty-Osiris-Seth.
- Horus was the son of Isis and Osiris.



Other important gods

NAME	SYMBOL	FUNCTION
Tawaret	hippo 	goddess of pregnancy, childbirth
Ma'at	feather 	goddess of order, justice, harmony, truth
Thoth	ibis, baboon 	god of wisdom, scribes
Sobek	crocodile 	sometimes creator god, sometimes destroyer
Apophis	snake 	god of chaos, leader of evil spirits
Ra/Re		solar god who nightly contends with Apophis

Forms of the sun god

From early dynastic period

- Morning: Khepri (sacred beetle)
- Midday: Re
- Evening: Atum

New Kingdom

- Amun (eventually Amun-Re)
- Aten (sun disk)



Her-Heru, the first Priest-King, and Queen Netchemet reciting a Hymn to the Rising Sun (ca. 150 BCE)

The Apes represent the Spirits of the Dawn.

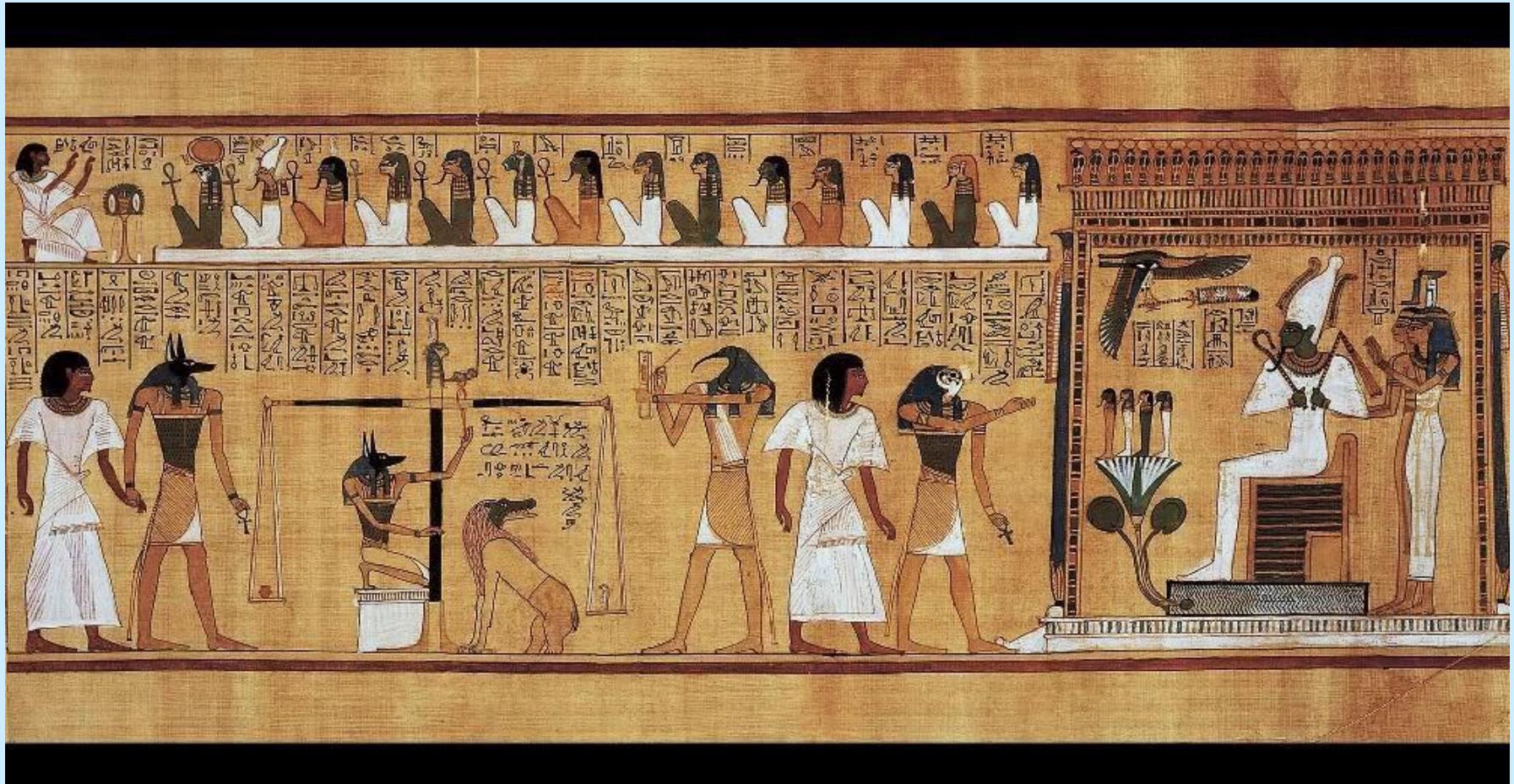
From a papyrus in the British Museum.

- Humans were created from potter's wheel of Khnum...or tears of the eye goddess...or...
- Gods had many human characteristics... including failings...
- The soul: ka (vital force while alive), ba (bird-like), akh (considered to be omnipresent; while asleep, the living could see an akh)

The heart



Weighing of the heart



“Light-hearted”

VIII. Egyptian Oracles: Getting a little help (or not) from the gods

Oracles

- Oracles, in which a god was called on to judge a civil matter, are first known from the Middle Kingdom.
- During Dynasty 18 (New Kingdom) oracles came to be used for divine approval of political decisions (e.g., a king's accession, a major trade or military expedition), then more mundane matters (dynasties 19-20).

How did oracles make judgments?

- On horizontal poles, *Wab* priests (the lowest order) ceremonially carried the portable bark with the god's image out of the temple.
- A question written on a piece of papyrus or an ostraca would be laid before the god.
- The god would make the bark move.
- Lectors (literate priests) announced whether the movement showed the god's favor or disfavor.

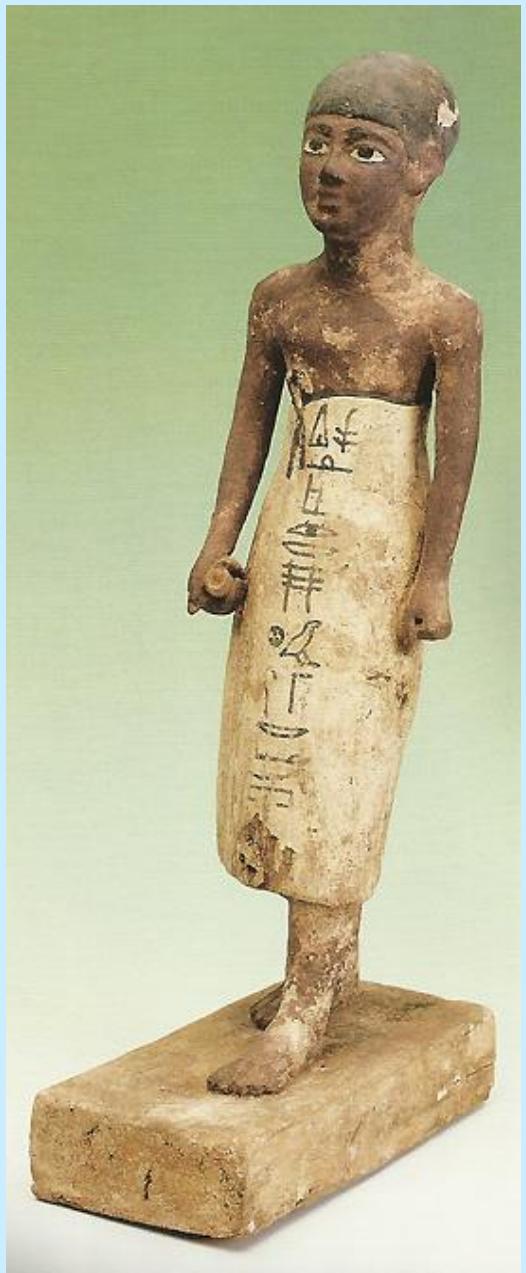


IX. Religious organization

The priesthood

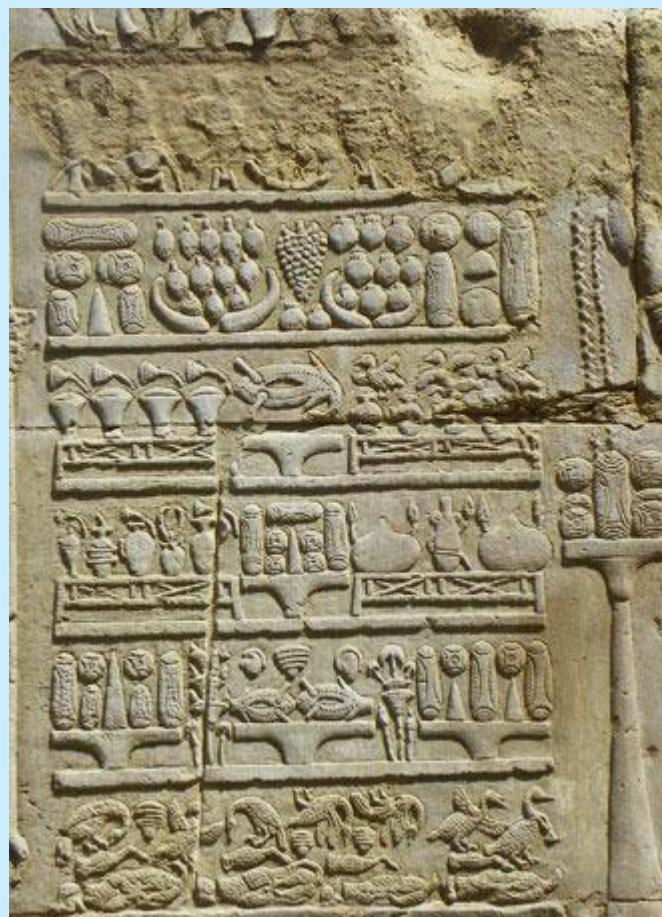
- Several hierarchical ranks of priest existed with different chores assigned to different ranks, such as:
 - Managing food deliveries
 - Monitoring temple property
 - Reading and reciting spells (a special role that required literacy)
- The king sometimes selected the highest priests.

- Even relatively small temples had 50-80 priests.
- Priests could serve multiple deities.
- Priestly positions were often inherited.
- Until the New Kingdom, most priests had other professions and did priestly work part-time.



How were priests paid?

- People were expected to bring offerings to leave for gods or the deceased (temples, chapels, tombs).
- While bread and beer were the most common offerings, others included far more elaborate food and votive objects.
- The offerings ended up on the priests' own tables.
- These were called “reversion” offerings and lasted throughout the history of ancient Egypt.





Baked clay votive offering for the gods in the form of a woman's vulva. It may allude to the desire for children or perhaps for a cure from a gynecological illness. Medinet Habu. Dynasties 21-24 (New Kingdom).

X. Magic

- In ancient Egypt (in all cultures?), magic and religion had a blurred line between them.
- In itself, magic was morally neutral and could be used for good or ill.
- Magicians had to be literate (e.g., to read spells).

Spells covered a wide range of problems—e.g.:

- Protection of a mother and her newborn
- Protection against bearing twins
- Accompaniment of medical treatment
- Healing from scorpion or snake bites
- Escaping a crocodile
- Cure for hangover or headache
- Protection against food poisoning
- Protection for books
- “Grace” before a meal

National security (or not)

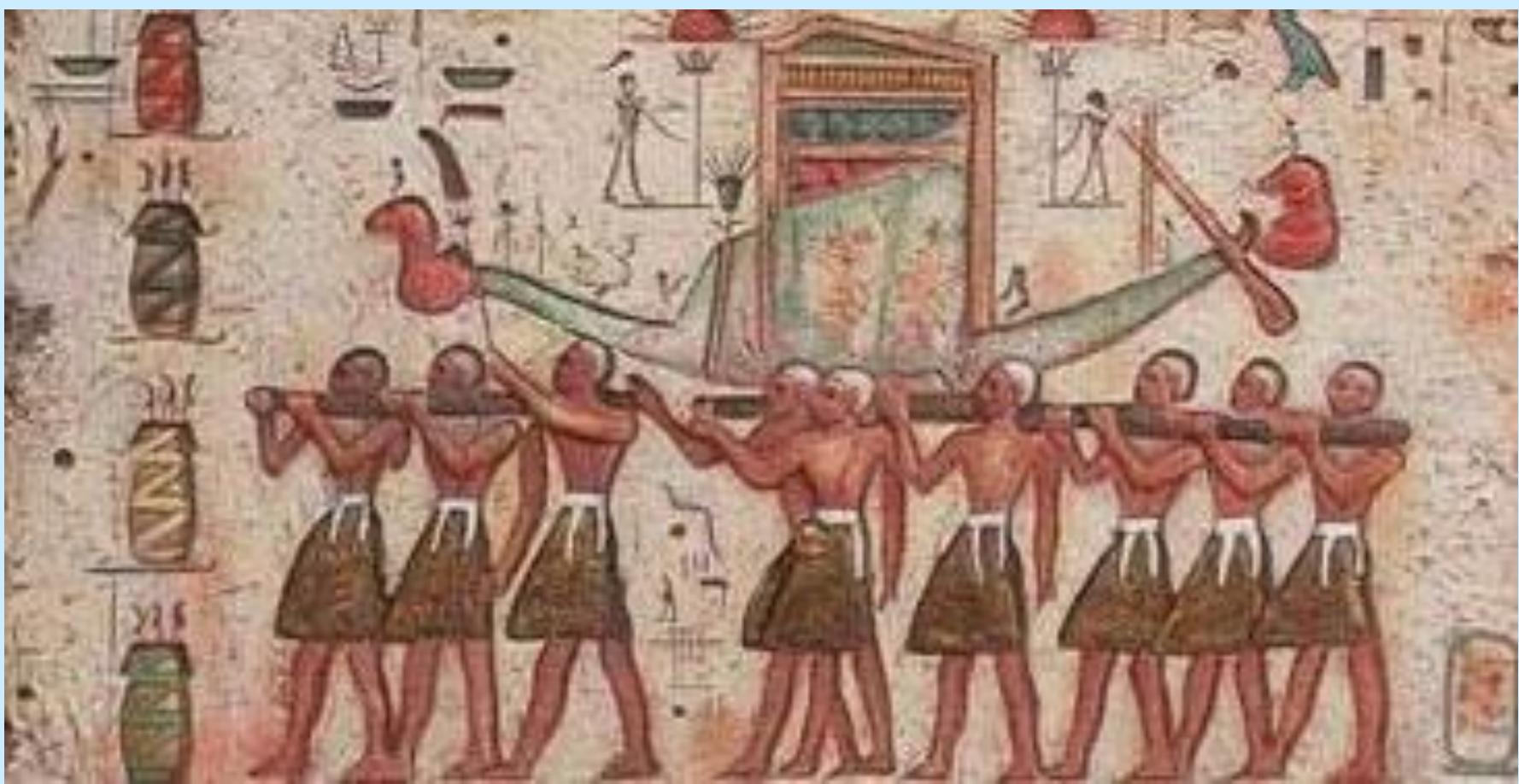
- If identified by name, rebels and other enemies of the state could be thwarted by smashing figurines of them.
- Rebels themselves might use the same magic to overthrow a ruler.

XI. Festivals

- Egyptians had many festivals—expensive, complex community affairs.
- Differences between funerary and non-funerary celebrations were marginal.
- The pretext for these festivals was care for the gods.

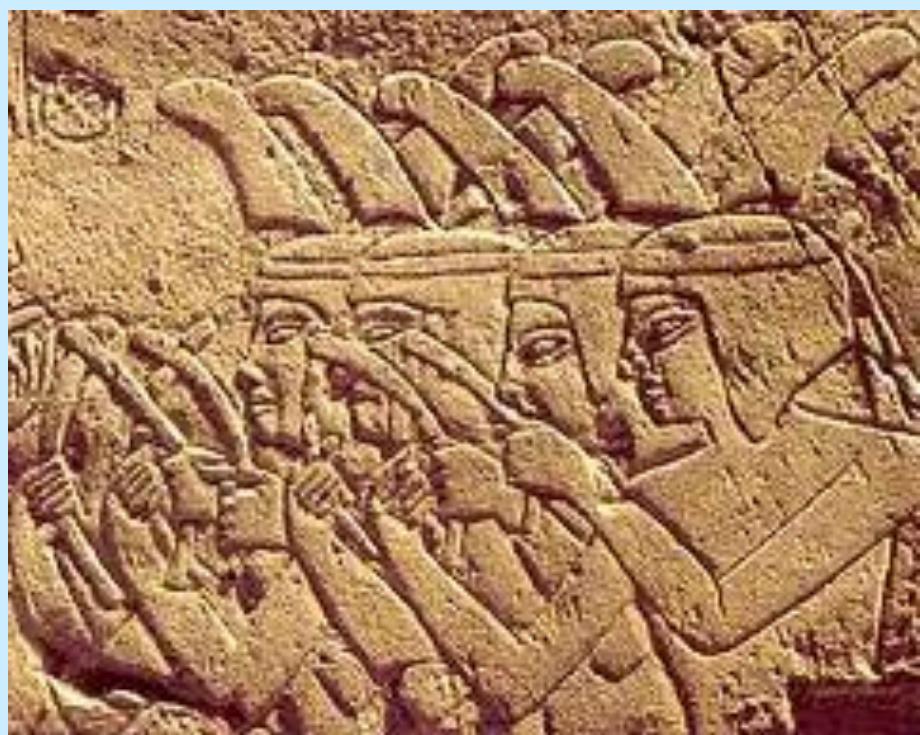
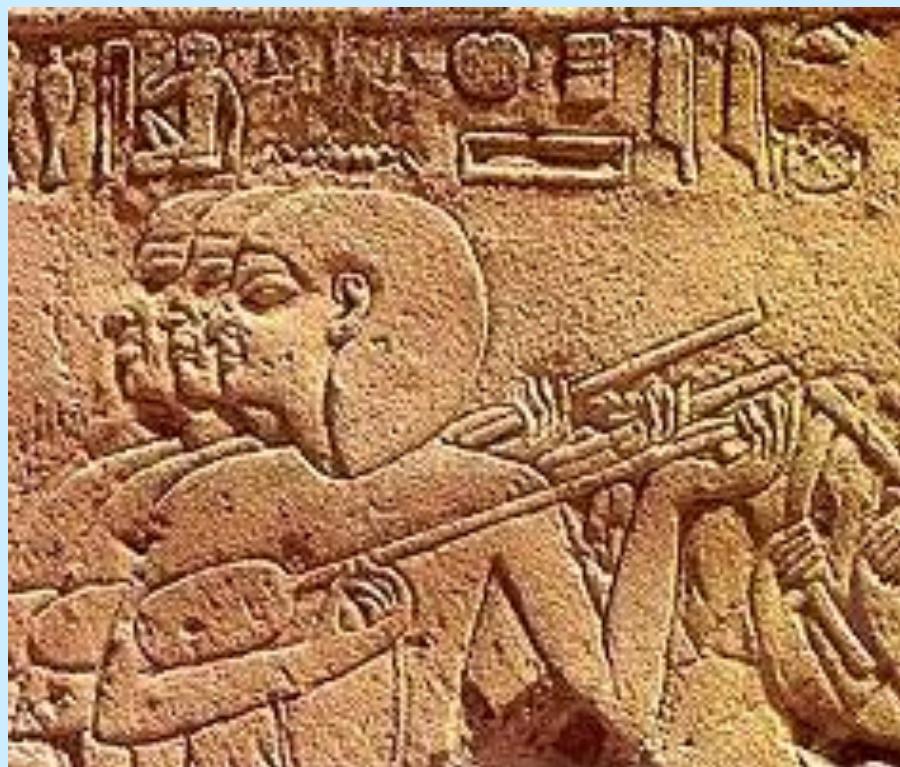
Typical festival components

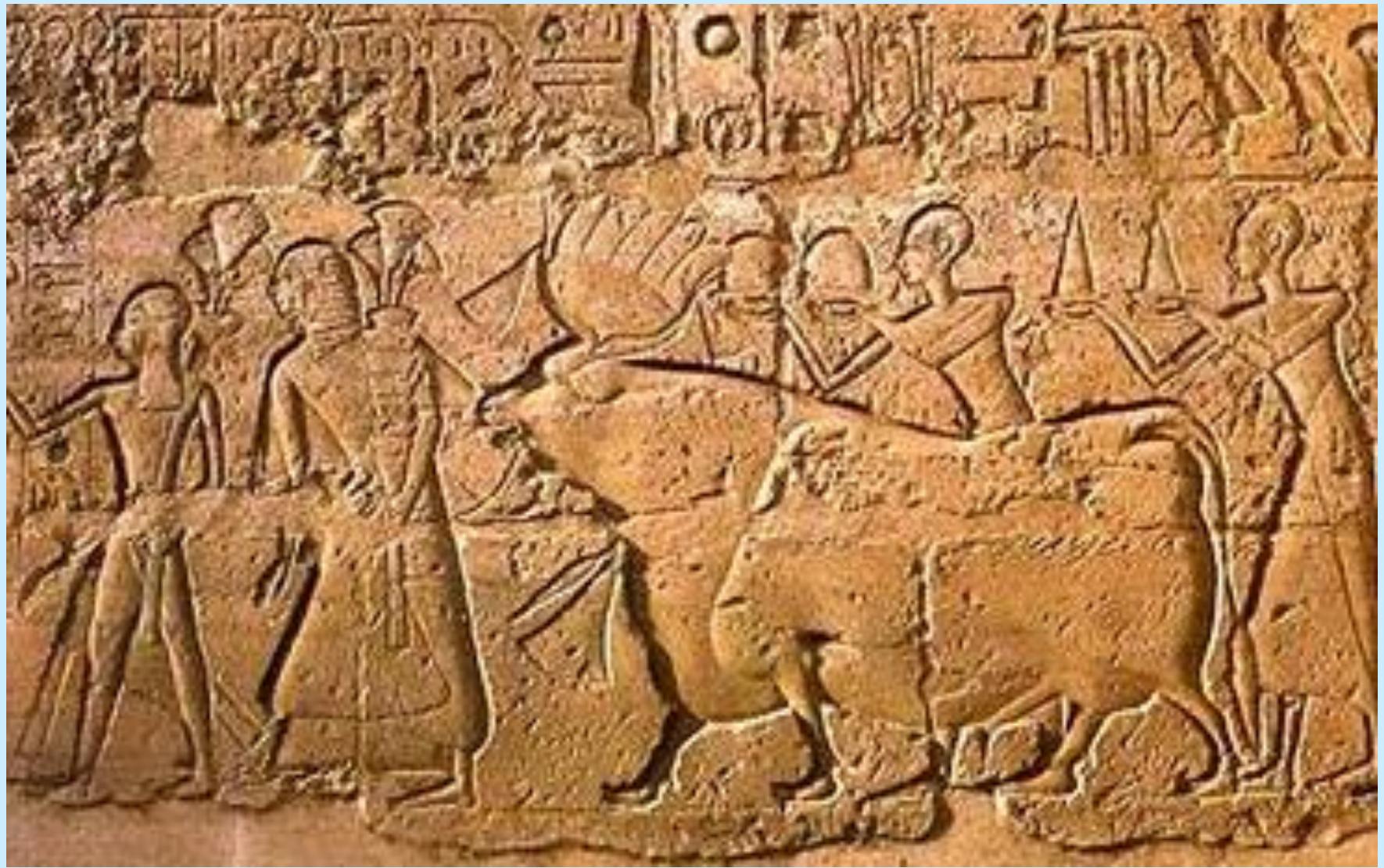
- Stimulation of the senses via sound (e.g., instrumental music, singing, clanging rattles), movement (e.g., parades, wrestling), scents (e.g., food, perfumes, incense), ritual theatrics, alcohol, and the prospect of being in the presence of the divine
- Priestly processions from a god's temple using horizontal poles lifting ornate bark bearing the god, who would pay visits to the west bank of the Nile.













Festival of Osiris (Khoiak)

- 18 days in the 4th month (~October) of the annual flood
- Commemoration of Seth’s dispersal of Osiris’s body parts; symbol of resurrection
- Re-enactment of Seth’s attack (king played Horus)
- Communal grieving
- Souvenir sarcophagus “bricks” and corn “mummies” (sometimes ithyphallic, referring to Osiris’s ability to conceive a son after his own death)

Corn mummies of Osiris



Osiris bricks



Beautiful Feast of the Valley (Thebes)

- First recorded at end of 1st intermediate period
- Allowed the living to communicate with the dead, an echo of the cyclic nature of birth-life-death
- Evoked re-creation and rejuvenation by imagining that at night, ithyphallic Amun slept with Hathor
- Exploited the resulting fertility by offering visitors souvenir wood phalluses and clay figurines of women in general and Hathor in particular

Sed Festival

- Lasting up to 2 months, the Sed goes back to pre-dynastic times and may have replaced earlier ritual sacrifices of a ruler.
- It was supposed to be celebrated on the 30th anniversary of a reign and then every 3-10 years afterwards during that reign.
- The honored ruler would perform energetic feats (e.g., dancing, jumping) to show his continuing vitality.
- Performances included ritual battles between followers of Horus and Seth.

Djoser proving his youth



Harvest festival (spring)

- Held in honor of Min (commonly portrayed as ithyphallic), god of vegetation and fertility
- Included a parade in which the Pharaoh took part
- Post-parade: elaborate feast accompanied by music, dancing, and sports



XII. Death

Why does death seem so central to ancient Egypt?

- Because cemeteries located on the desert edge have survived better than towns and villages on the floodplain?
- Because tombs have provided generations of archaeologists with rich and relatively easy pickings, while the excavation of ancient settlements is difficult, laborious, and less glamorous?
- Because dealing with death truly was central to Egyptian imaginations?

- Egyptian preoccupation with death was with how to overcome it.
- The dead were not gone but “away.”
- As with their understanding of the gods, Egyptians developed a conception of life after death that was rooted in what they could see around them.

XIIa. Mummification



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Anubis watching over a mummy



Early Egyptian mummies

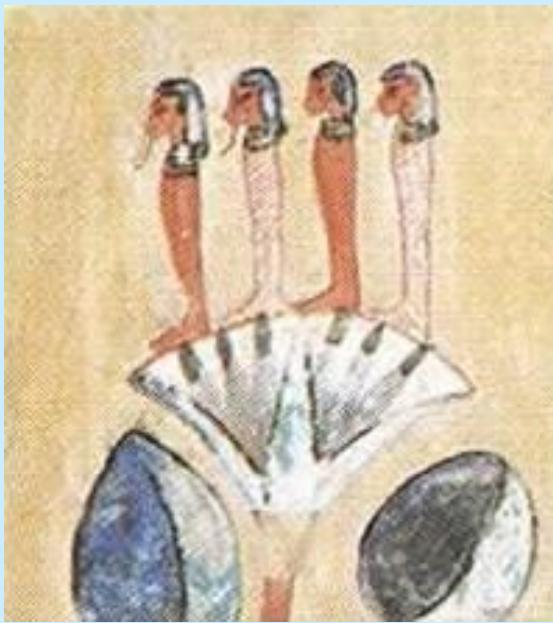
- Anubis was said to have turned the body of Osiris into the first mummy.
- 2nd-Dynasty corpses wrapped in linen bandages soaked in resin indicate early attempts to preserve the body.
- Increased use of wood and resin in middle-status burials of the 2nd Dynasty probably points to greatly increased contact and trade with the Levant.

Mummification techniques evolved

- From early on, canopic jars held key organs (lungs, intestines, stomach, liver), but the jars' style evolved.
- Kidneys were often left in the body.
- Wrappings came to require careful inspection before being used.
- Wrapping and the body became steeped with a growing variety of unguents.
- Each part of the wrapping became associated with some specific divine characteristic (e.g., the god Sekhmet, the eyes of Ra, a slogan).

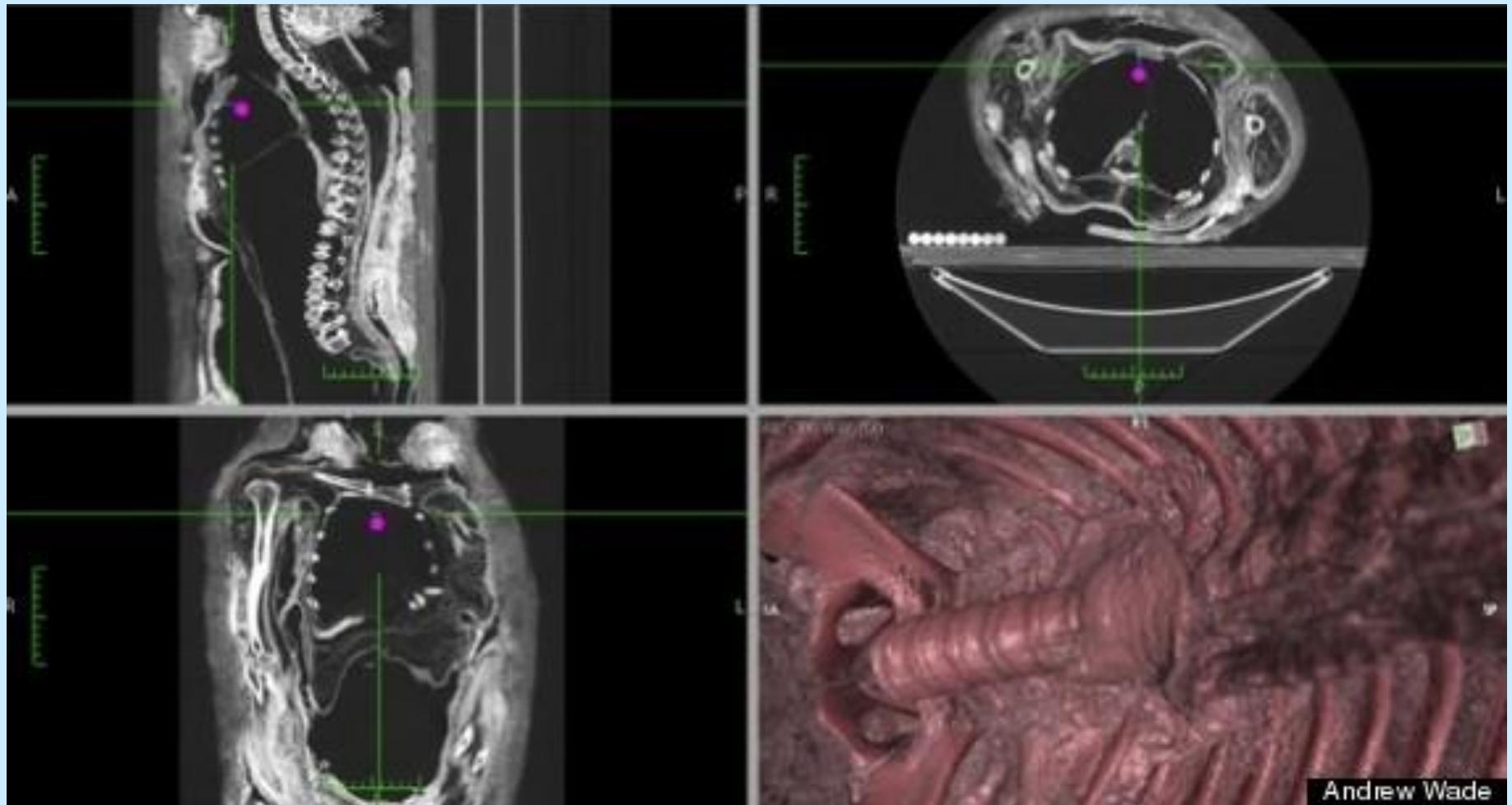
- After evisceration, bodies were rubbed with a mild antiseptic such as palm wine and covered with packets of natron, a naturally occurring salt.
- The bodies were then left to dry out for many days, packed with linen or wood shavings, and sometimes perfumed with scented items.
- In later times, an eviscerated body might be packed with stuffing (e.g., cloth).

“4 sons of Horus”



2013 updates on mummification

- Ancient Egyptians probably did not remove mummy guts using cedar oil enemas, as previously believed.
- Both rich and poor commonly had a transabdominal slit, although for the elites evisceration was sometimes performed via a slit through the anus.
- Only a quarter of mummies had their hearts left in place.
- The removal of the heart seems to coincide with the transition period when the middle class gained access to mummification, so getting to keep the heart may have become a status symbol.
- About a fifth of the brains were left inside the skulls of the mummies studied.



CT slices and 3D reconstruction showing the empty body cavity of the Royal Ontario Museum's ROM910.5.3 mummy.

Misc. facts about mummification

- Overseeing the mummification and burial of a parent was the greatest obligation of children.
- Middle Kingdom mummification became increasingly sloppy; this trend reversed with the New Kingdom.
- Early in the 3rd intermediate period, royal mummies were removed from their tombs, stripped of most valuables, and reburied in groups in unobtrusive and easily guarded caches.
- Yet standards and techniques of mummification reached their peak in the 21st Dynasty (early 3rd intermediate period).

- Food for an individual's tomb could come from offerings that were presented daily in a local temple of a god.
- Another means of providing food offerings was by covering the walls of the tomb or the coffin with images of food (the principle of substitution).
- Food could also be supplied by three-dimensional models.
- Offerings might include eye paints, oils, types of cakes and bread, meats, beers and wines, and fruit and vegetables.

A couple of funerary rituals

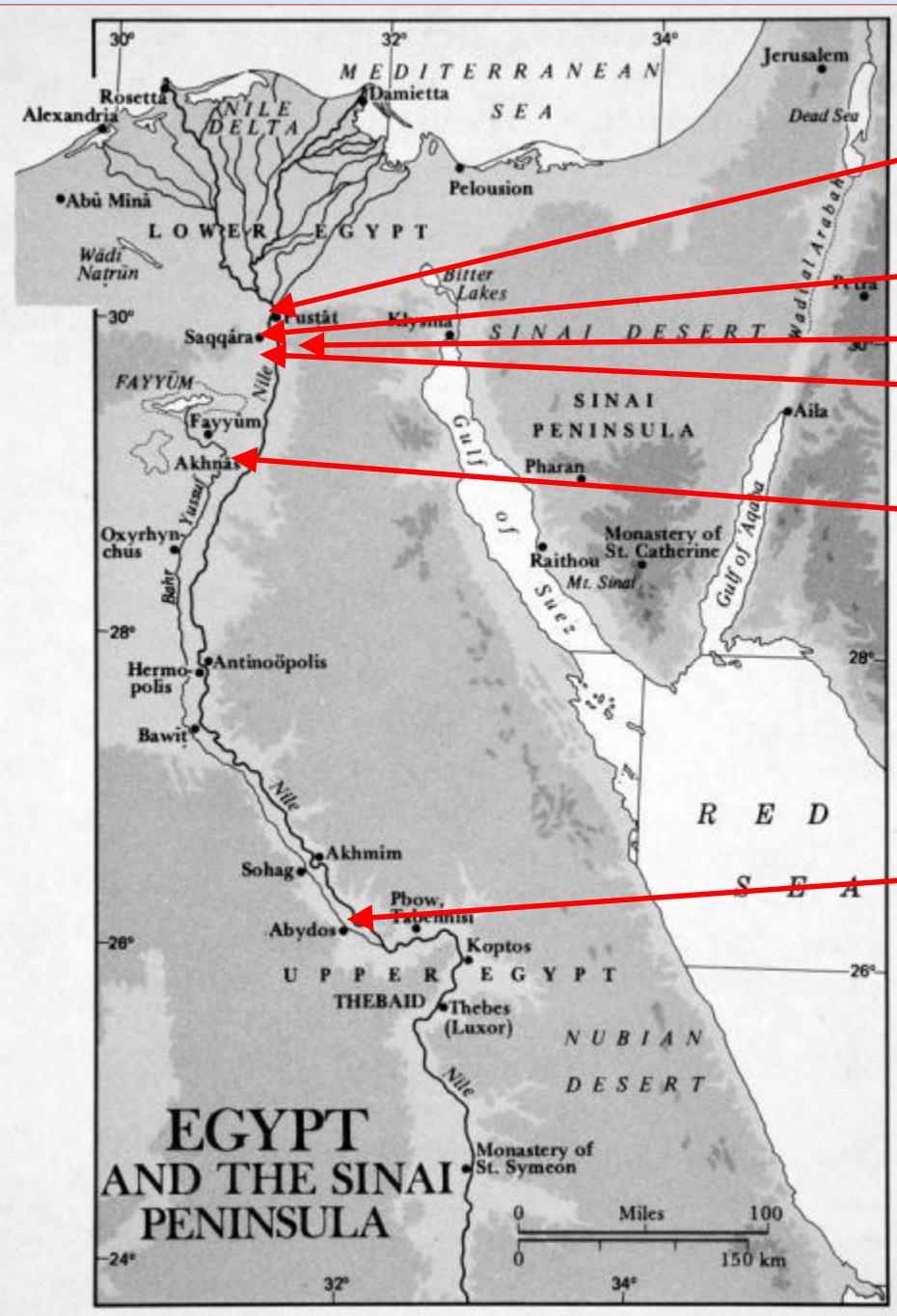
- “Opening of the mouth”: a special priest used ritual tools or his fingers to touch the mummy’s face ritually and thereby enable the deceased to see, speak, hear, and taste in the afterlife.
- The priest might perform the same ritual on statues.
- As rulers and others provided offerings to the gods, so for all eternity (or at least many generations) were survivors and their descendants expected to provide offerings to deceased family members.

Mummies included virtually every animal that walked, slithered, or flew in the Nile Valley.



XIIb. Burial

- Tombs, temples, statues and the like were forms of monumental architecture that expressed aspirations of rulers and nobility.
- Building projects had to support craftsmen and artisans.
- Quarrying, transport, carving, and erection of large pieces of stone imply large-scale social organization.
- Conscription must have been used to gather soldiers (to guard trade and mining expeditions) and workers.
- The projects were supported by “taxes” upon a (hoped for) massive surplus of grain.



Giza

Saqqara

Memphis

Dashur

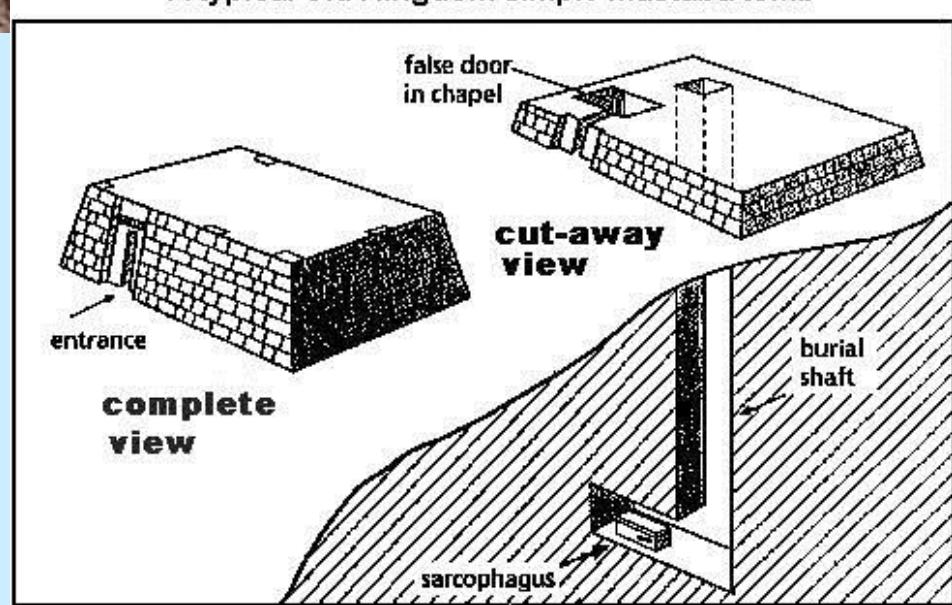
Meidum

Abydos

Mastabas



A typical Old Kingdom simple mastaba tomb



- Aha's dynasty 1 tomb complex (looted in antiquity) shows traces of large wooden shrines in three chambers and thirty-three subsidiary burials with the remains of young males, 20-25 years old, who had probably been killed when the king was buried.
- Teeth of these sacrificial victims suggest death by strangulation.
- All other 1st-Dynasty royal burials at Abydos have non-royal burials in wooden coffins.
- This is the only period in ancient Egypt when humans were sacrificed for royal burials.

- An Old Kingdom text recounts the difficulties of lowering a huge stone sarcophagus down a deep vertical mastaba shaft.
- At North Saqqara in the 1st Dynasty, we find evidence of burials of an official class, not just the ruler.
- Middle and lower officials were buried elsewhere.

Step pyramid of Djoser (ca. 2650-2575)

- This is the first known monument in the world made entirely of stone.
- In the early 1990s, 12 boat burials of an unknown purpose were discovered—the earliest evidence of an association between boats and the royal mortuary cult.

The Step Pyramid



The Step Pyramid architect

- Imhotep was believed to be the inventor of building in stone.
- Later he was deified and regarded as a son of the god Ptah and the patron of scribes and physicians.

The next pyramids: Sneferu (2613-2589)

Under Sneferu (dynasty 3), the true pyramid form gradually emerged.

FIRST, the “Bent” Pyramid (limestone) at Dashur (105m. tall): the angle of the sloping sides was too steep and, about 2/3 of the way up, was altered to a more gradual pitch



SECOND: The Red Pyramid (104m. tall; named after the color of limestone blocks used) at Dashur, where Sneferu was actually buried



THIRD: A possible effort at Meidum (limestone; 92 m. tall); 1200 years later, 18th Dynasty (literate!) tourists wrote graffiti saying that it belonged to Sneferu



Giza: dynasty 4

- The 3 huge pyramids are by father (Khufu), son (Khepre) and grandson (Menkaure).
- Khufu's was the first and largest: ground plan of 230 sq. m., and a height of 146.5 m.
- Atypically, the burial chamber is situated in the core of the pyramid, not below ground or at ground level.
- Three pyramids with bodies of Khufu's queens are lined up east of his own pyramid.



- Work on Khufu's pyramid was year-round, one gang relieving another, with all workers (perhaps 10,000 in all) supposedly toiling on behalf of the glory of the king.
- Workers were free citizens organized into "gangs" who worked seasonal shifts.
- Each worker required support crews who hauled water, made pottery vessels, harvested the grain to make the bread that fed the workers, and picked and transported vegetables and other supplies.

End of the pyramids

- After Giza, pyramids became much more modest but continued to be built for nearly 1000 years.
- The last royal pyramids were built in the late Middle Kingdom.
- In the New Kingdom, tombs were cut into valley walls near Thebes: the Valley of the Kings and Valley of the Queens.
- The mountain surrounding the valley may have seemed to be a kind of surrogate pyramid.



Valley of the Kings

Workers' tombs
(necropolis)

Workers' village

Valley of the Kings



Valley of the Queens



XIIc. Supplies for the afterlife

Tomb models



Shabti/Shawabti/Ushabti





“Texts” to help navigate the afterlife

- Traversing the *Tuat* (the Other World or Dead Land) to join Osiris was a perilous journey.
- The dead needed help, and so starting with the end of the 5th dynasty, various texts were created, which included:
 - Pyramid texts (Unas, end of 5th dynasty)
 - Coffin texts (1st intermediate period and Middle Kingdom)
 - Books of the Dead (New Kingdom)
 - Misc. other texts (e.g., *Book of the Two Ways*, *Book of Gates*) at different times

Different texts had different specific content, details and lengths, but they provided similar information with a similar goal: to get through the hostile part of the underworld. Content typically included:

- Spells, hymns and prayers to control hostile forces
- Maps to help find your way
- Mythological tales to identify the deceased person with gods and divine events
- Places to expect opposition

A few curiosities in these texts

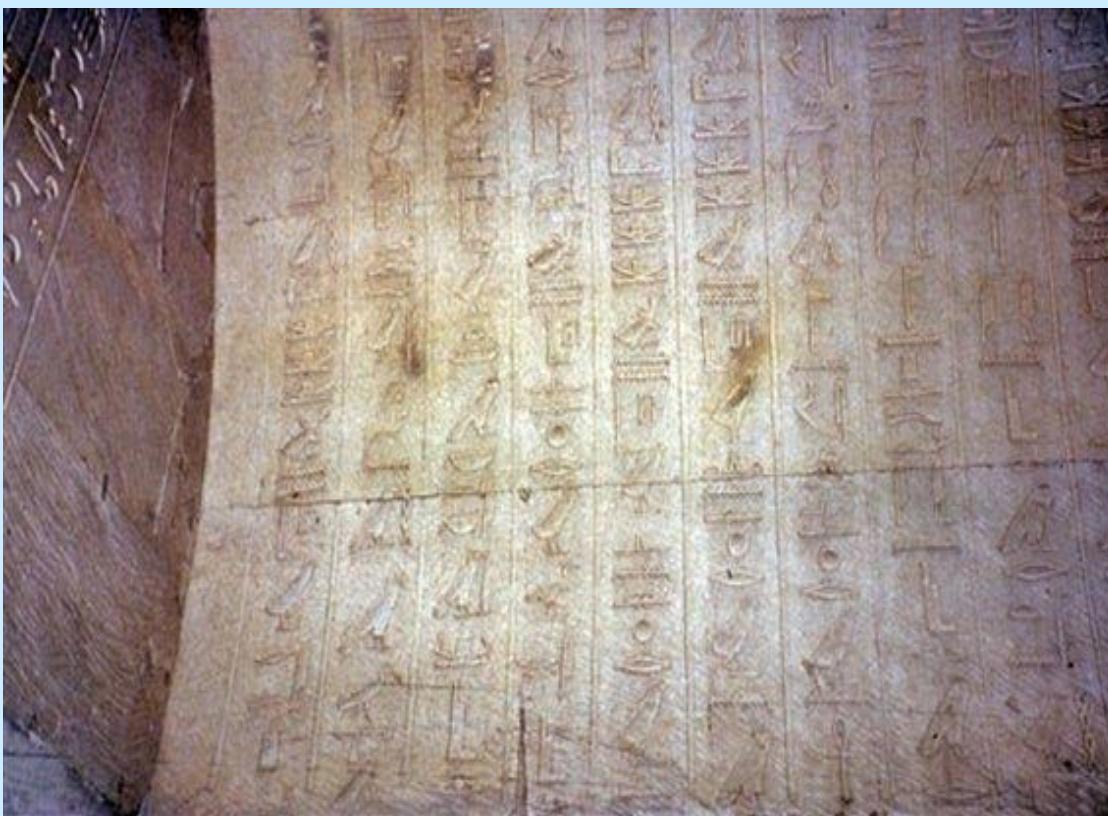
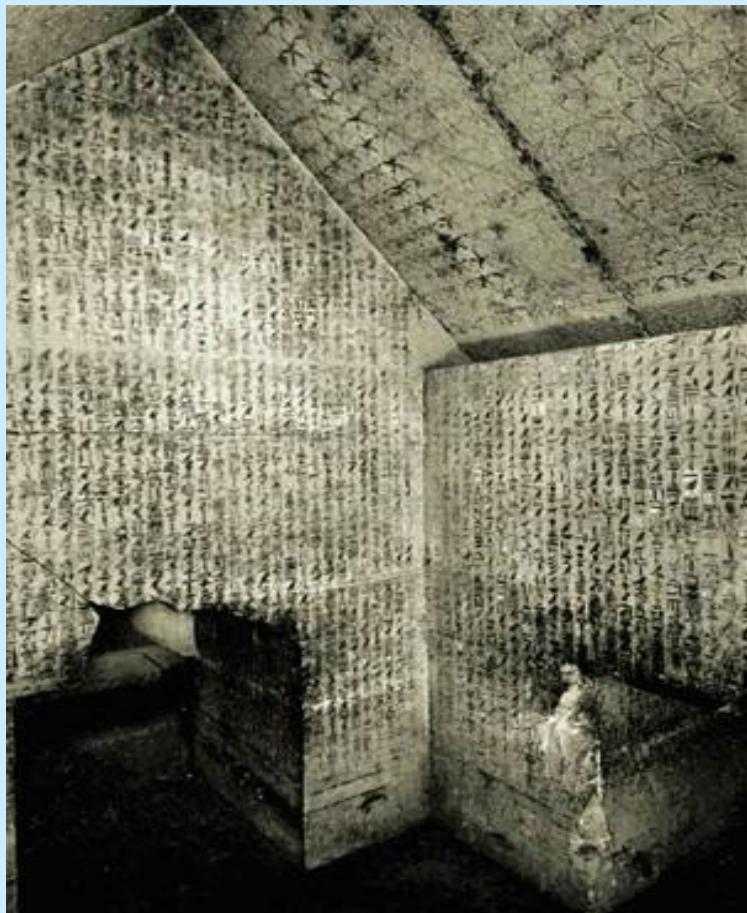
- Unas, “the Cannibal Hymn”: “*Unas is he who eats people, who lives on the gods... Unas is he who eats their magic, swallows their spirits: Their big ones are for his morning meal, Their middle ones for his evening meal, Their little ones for his night meal...*”
- Unas’s lettering was blue to recall the watery abyss of the underworld.
- Unas’s tomb has excruciating images of famine.
- A Middle Kingdom list of lucky and unlucky days (e.g., “*The whole day is lucky; a goddess protects other gods*”; “*The whole day is unlucky; Do not bathe on this day*” or “*He who is born on this day will die on this day*” or “*The first two-thirds of the day are unlucky, and the last third lucky*”)



<http://www.ancient-egypt.info/2012/04/unas-pharaoh-biography-and-pyramid.htmlc>

<http://proteus.brown.edu/templesandtombs/8059>





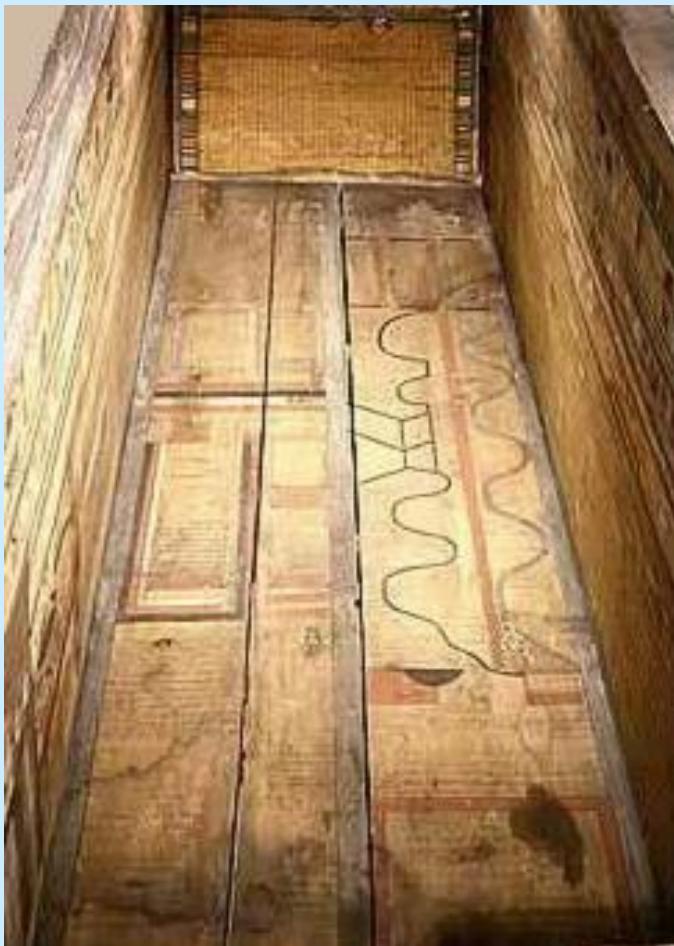


Coffin style from early dynastic period through Middle Kingdom



Anthropoid coffin: use begins in New Kingdom

Coffin text of Gua (“Chief physician”)





Tomb decoration



From the tomb of Ramesses II



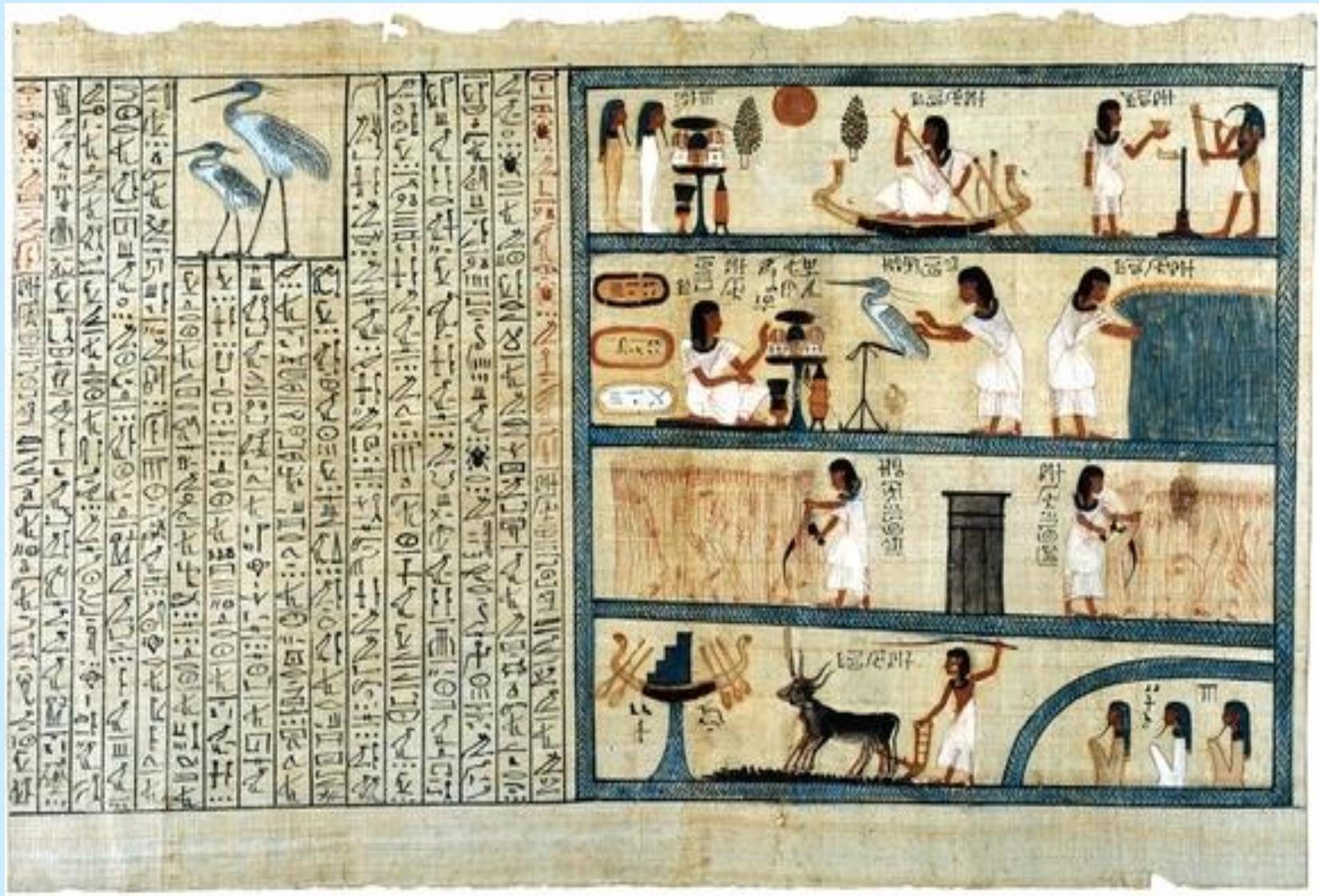
“Negative confessions” (Middle Kingdom)

Upon entering the Hall of the Two Truths (the *Duat*, where the weighing of the heart occurs), the deceased utters a long string of “I-have-not-” statements, such as:

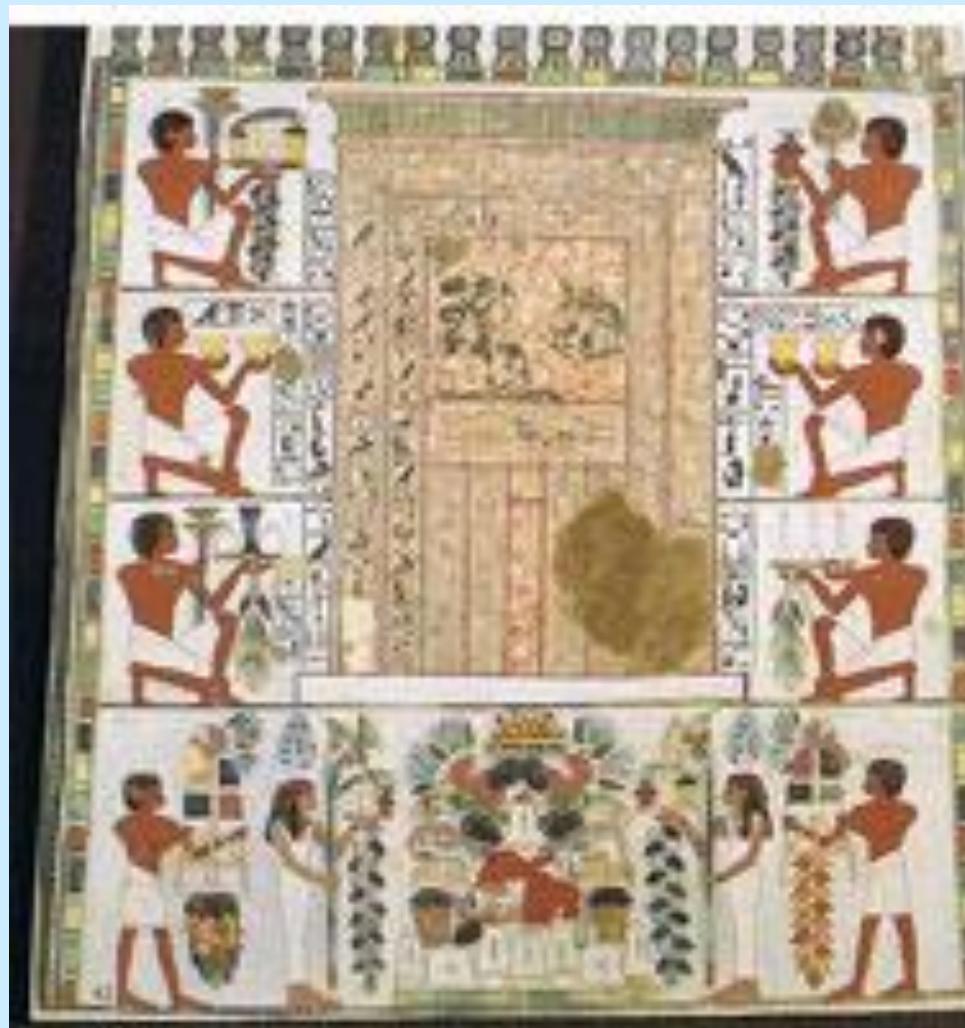
- I have not committed wrongdoing against anyone.
- I have not mistreated cattle.
- I have not deprived an orphan.
- I have not done that which the gods abominate.
- I have not slandered a servant to his superior.
- I have not caused weeping.
- I have not killed.
- I have not commanded to kill.

- I have not diminished the offering loaves in the temples.
- I have not copulated [with a boy].
- I have not been lascivious [in the sanctuary of my local god].
- I have not tampered with the plummet of the scales.
- I have not taken milk from the mouths of children.
- I have not deprived the flocks of their pasturage.
- I have not erected a dam against flowing water.
- I am pure, I am pure, I am pure, I am pure!

A “page” from a Book of the Dead



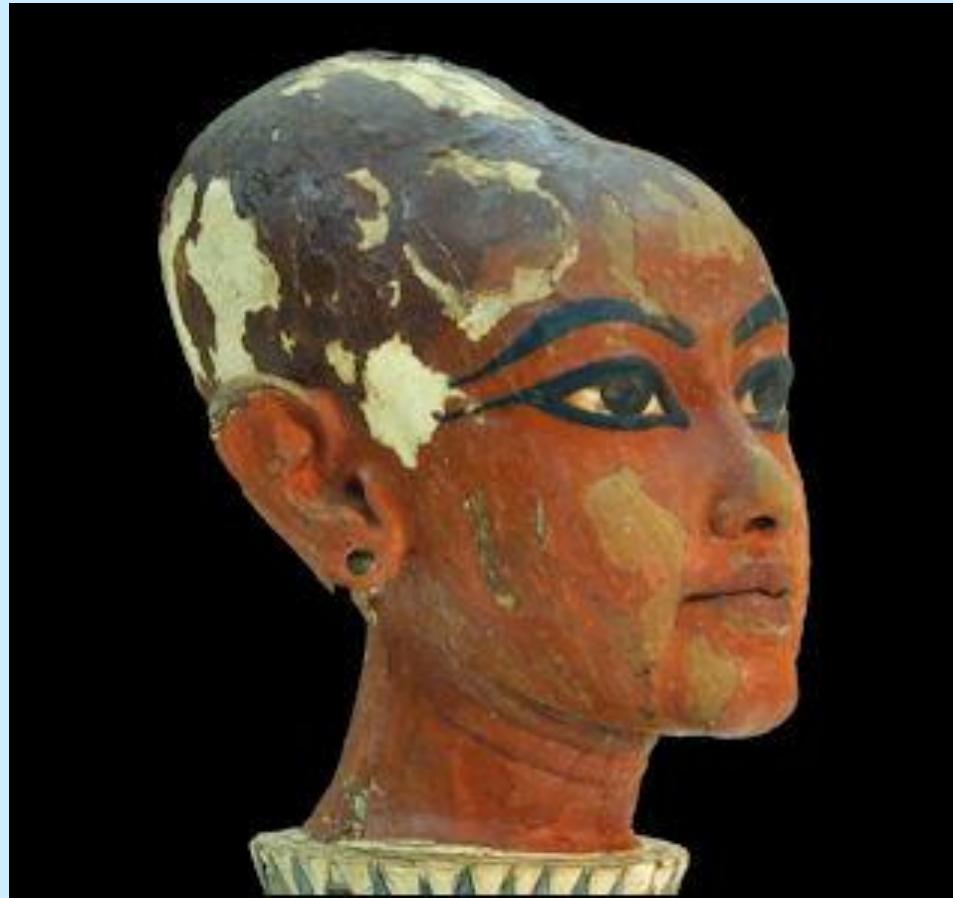
False door (from the tomb of an 18th dynasty scribe)



<http://www.ancientegyptonline.co.uk/falsedoors.html>

XIIId. Tutankhamun's tomb

What did Tutankhamen look like?



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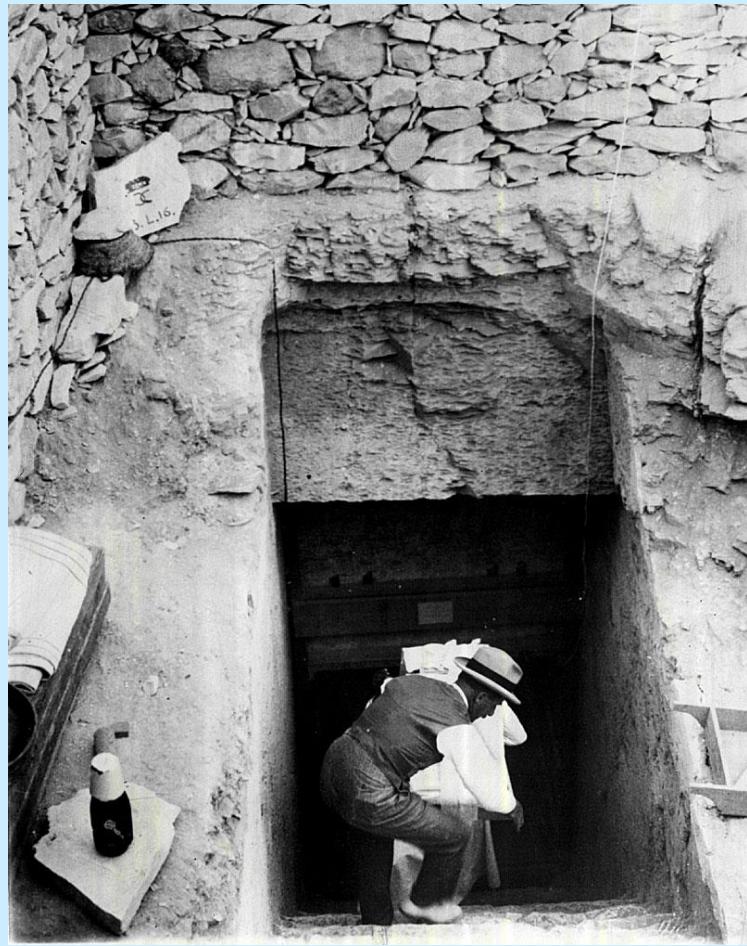
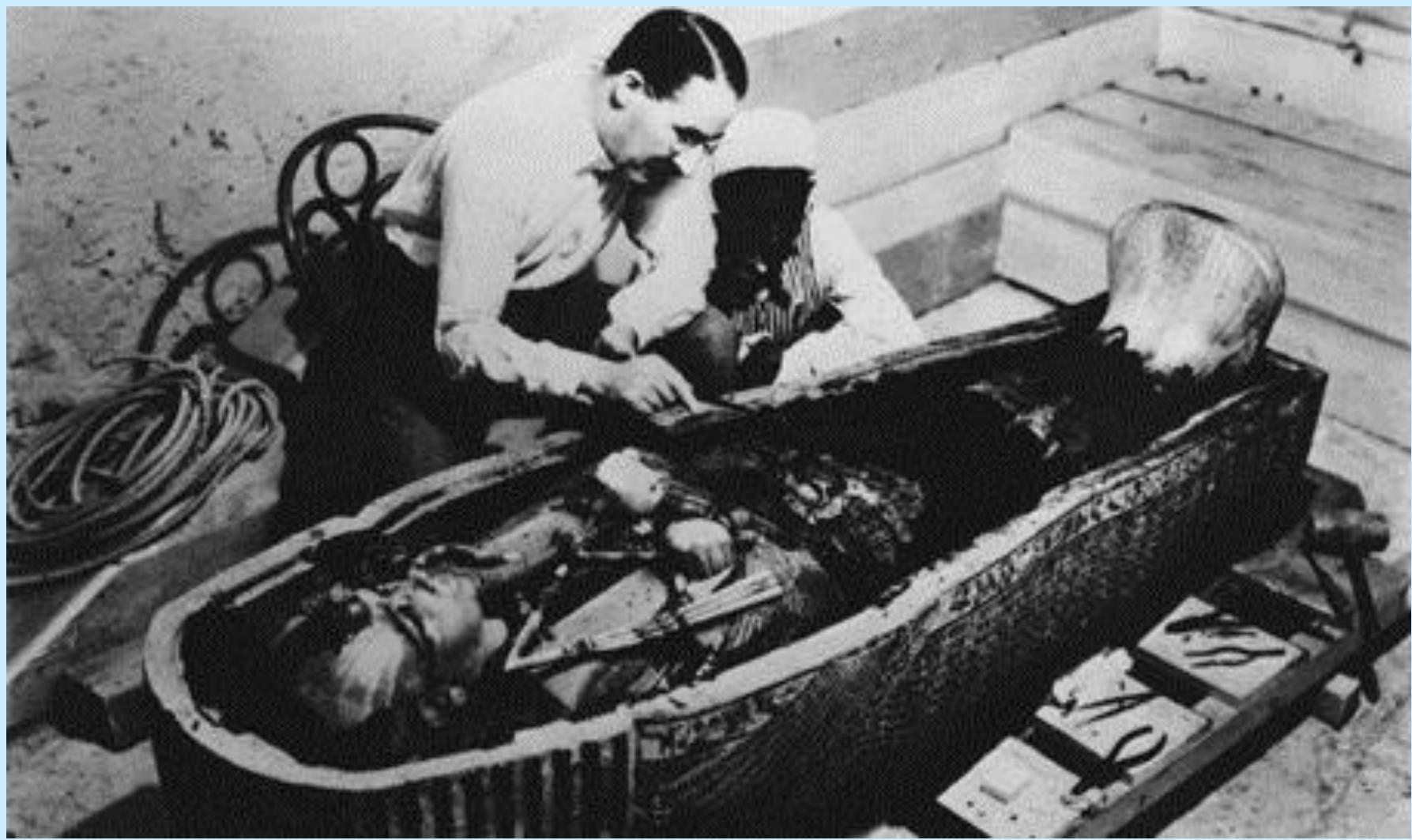


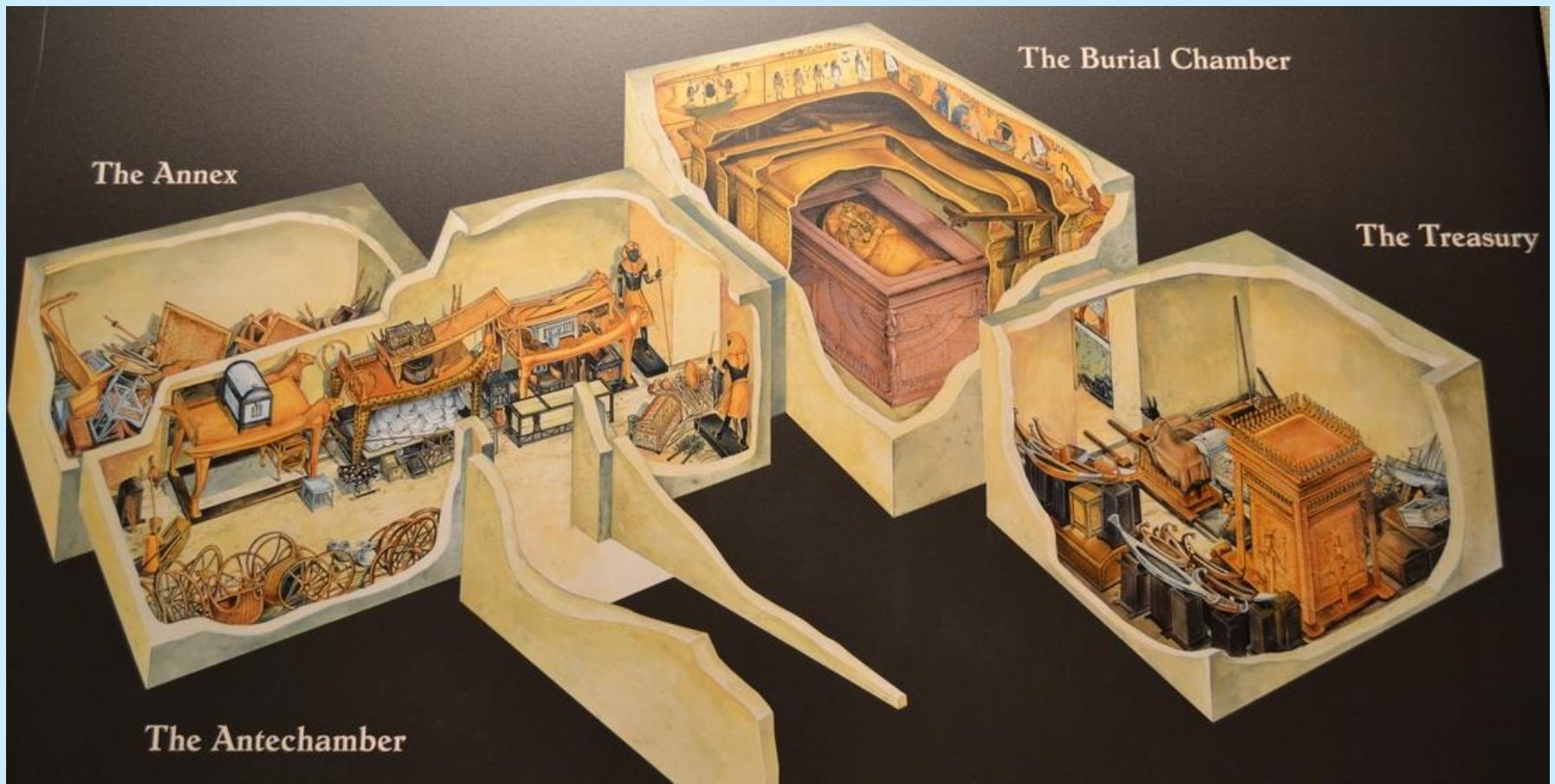


Photo by National Geographic Magazine

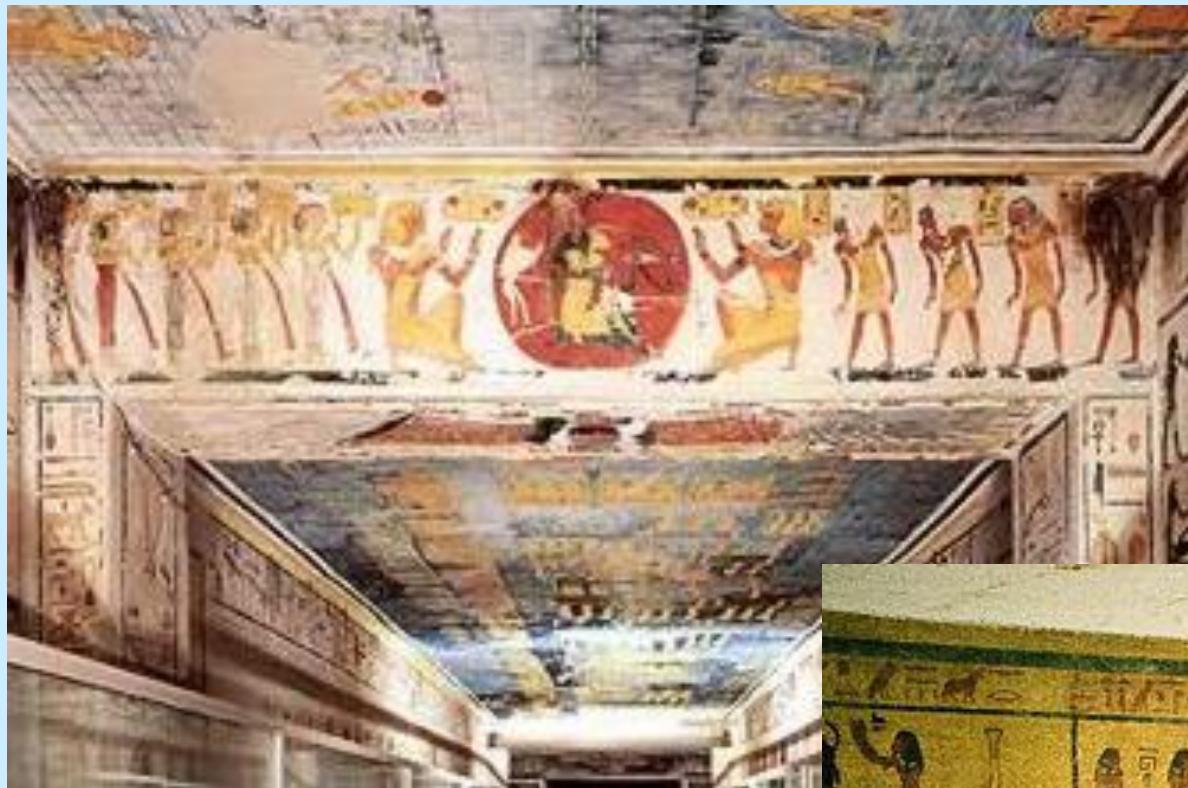


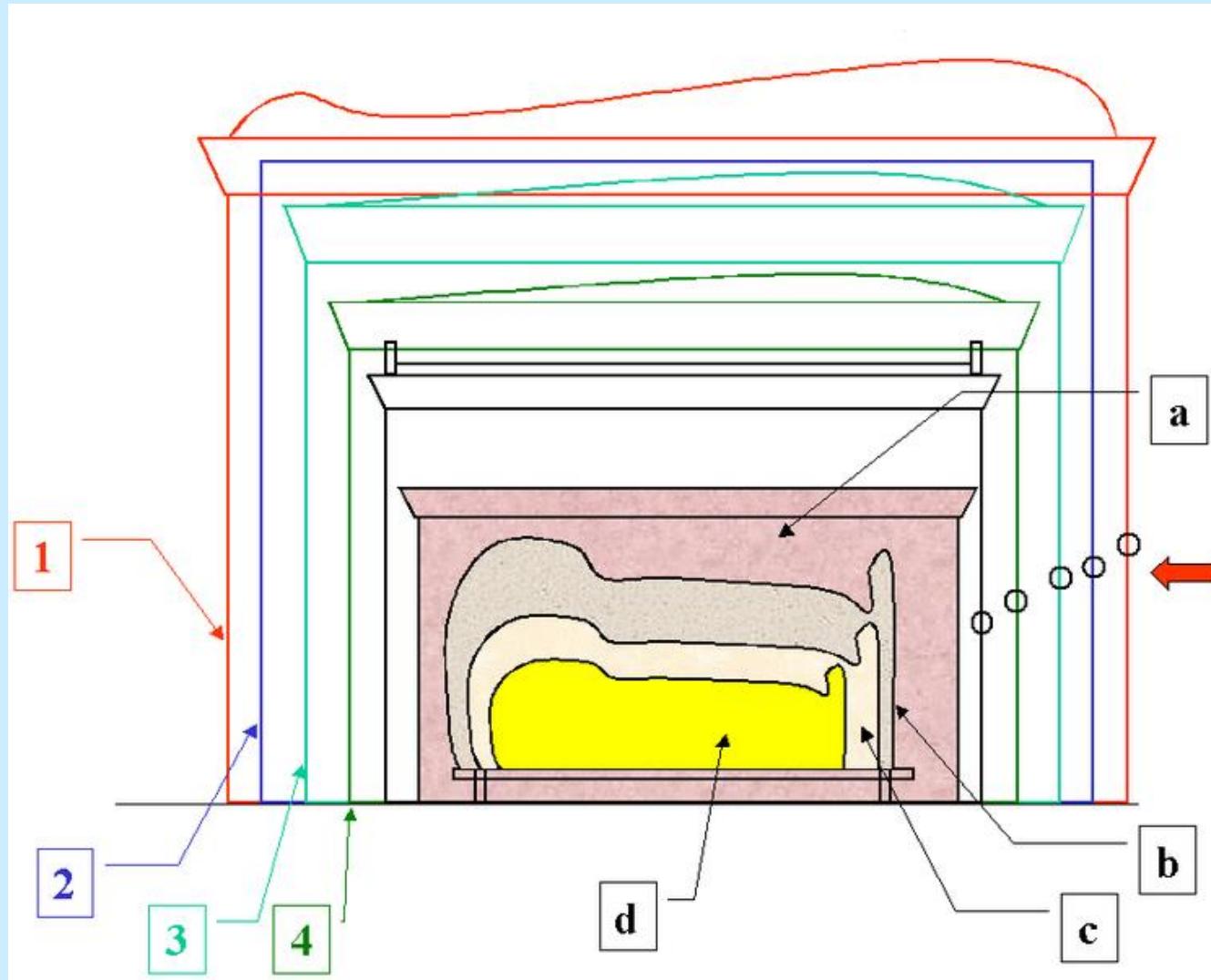














Inner Coffin of
Tutankhamun's
Sarcophagus



